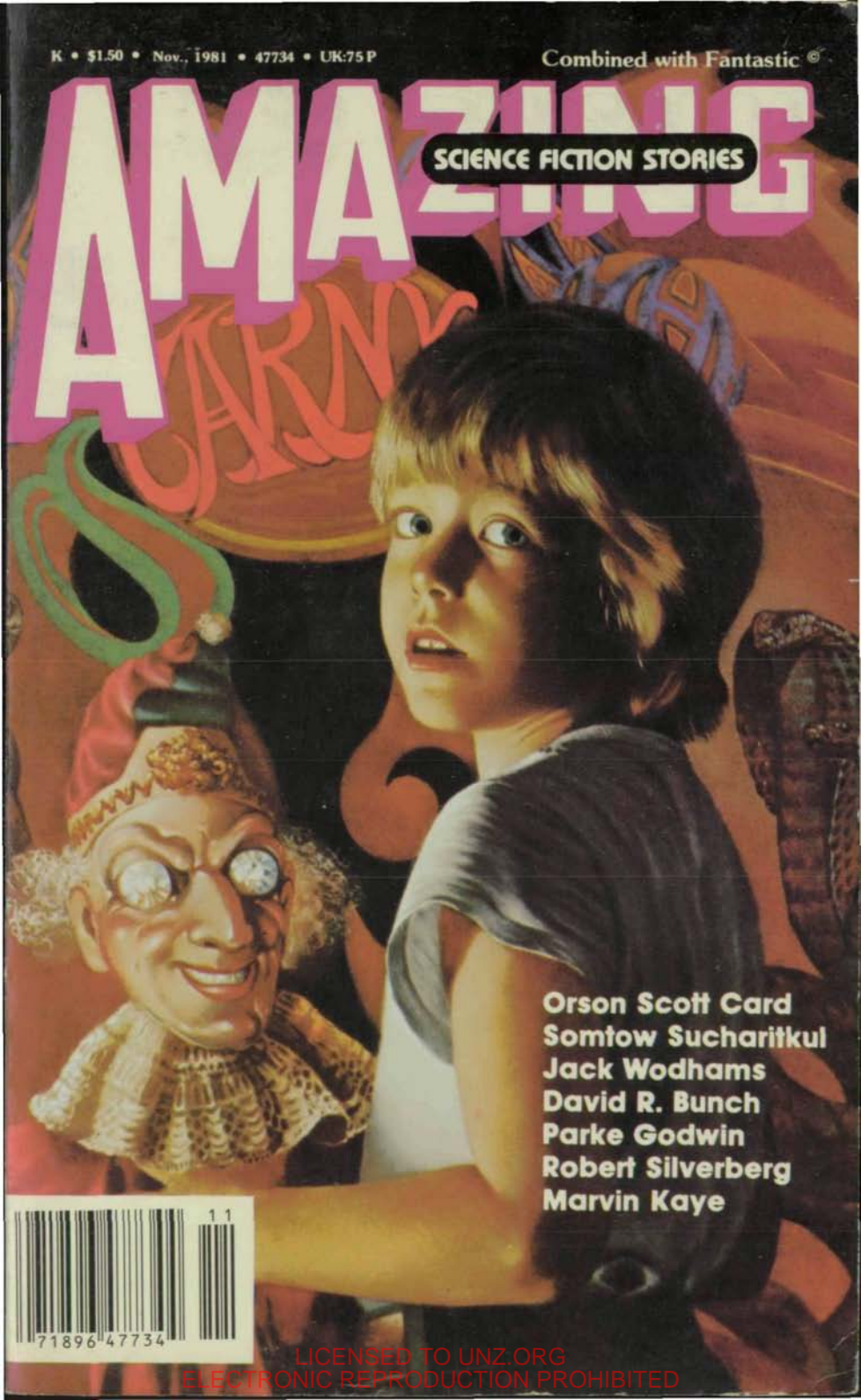


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# AMAZING

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES



Orson Scott Card  
Somtow Sucharitkul  
Jack Wodhams  
David R. Bunch  
Parke Godwin  
Robert Silverberg  
Marvin Kaye



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# AMAZING

SCIENCE ACTION STORIES

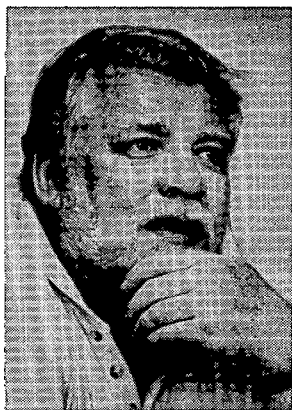
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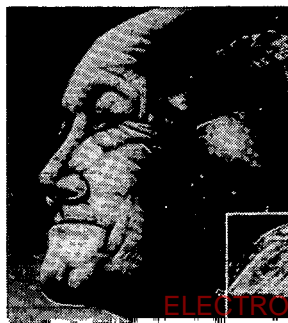
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truth."*



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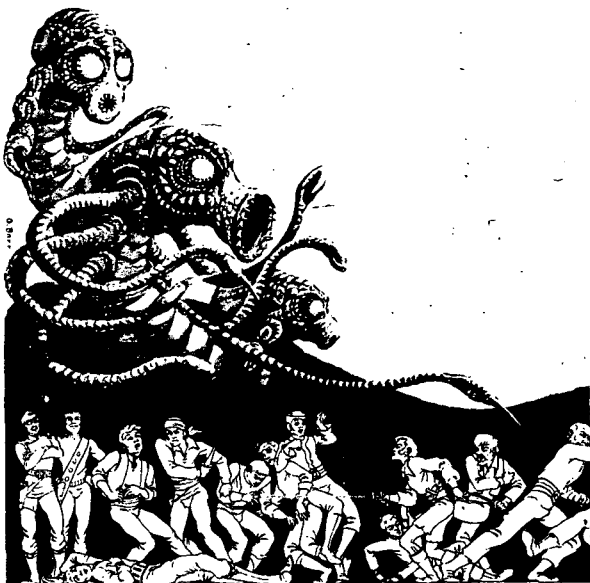
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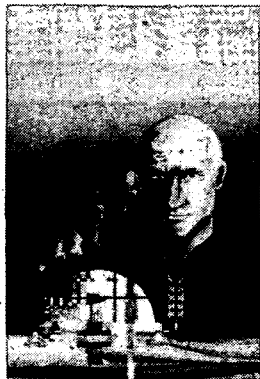


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# opinion

## Robert Silverberg

I HAVE NEVER thought of myself as particularly bigoted. I do have certain residual and practically innate attitudes that I acquired as a result of having grown up as a white male American of middle-class background, and I have some distinctly reactionary political notions that evolved in me during an adult life spent largely in the upper tax brackets. But I also belong to what was not very long ago a severely persecuted religious minority, and I'm not much given to racial or cultural prejudices; live and let live has been my general rule. On the other hand, I'm also a writer. I populate my stories with, among other entities, blacks, Jews, homosexuals, Protestants of Anglo-Saxon ancestry, women, Armenians, Turks, and Marxists. When some member of one of those groups behaves less than nobly in one of my stories, I've never regarded it as an attack on that group in general, since I've considered myself to be writing about individuals.

Hence my surprise when I received an issue of *Gay Community News*, a Boston paper, that contained a lengthy discussion of my use of prejudicial stereotypes. The item was actually an account of the Boston World of Convention of September, 1980, at which I was master of ceremonies, and the report on my performance began pleasantly enough with a description of me as "a writer we have long respected both for the brilliance of his writing and his long dedication to using unusual cultures, including gay culture, in his fiction." A footnote amplified on my various excellences as a writer, but then went on to observe:

"Sometimes, however, Silverberg's use of minorities is questionable. He relies on cartoon figures. In the novel *Dying Inside*, he has a gang of five talking black basketball players beat a man unconscious. Another novel, *The Book of Skulls*, has a gay character, Ned, who is purely vicious and

evil. Ned triggers the suicides of three other gay men, who all happened to have loved him. With this book, Silverberg is whipping gays with a double whammy — we're shown as being either horrible, self-centered monsters or death-wishing sad-sacks.

"On one hand, Silverberg's use of minority characters can be almost called commendable — he is showing us that we do not live in an all-male, Anglo-Saxon, lily-white world. However, the manner in which he uses minorities raises many questions."

The main question that comes to my mind out of all this is what impact minority hypersensitivity is going to have on creative artistry in science fiction. More than most other forms of category fiction (westerns, mysteries, gothics), sf is read by people who are emotionally or physically disadvantaged in some way, and those people, in our field, tend to be highly articulate. If gays, blacks, women, Jews, Armenians, or whatnot start screaming about prejudice every time a member of their group is shown in less than favorable light, a kind of minority tyranny will insure that all our villains are going to be WASP Republicans, and all our black characters will be as noble as Uncle Tom, all our gays as serene as Plato. That may make for virtuous social behavior but it makes for lousy fiction, and we already have a sufficiency of that. (Besides, the WASPS may start complaining too.)

The humorlessness of the minorities is an understandable sensitivity. When one has been subjected to irrational abuse for decades or centuries or millennia, one gets a little testy about it. (One also learns to get over that, after a while. The gays right now are as grouchy about their image as the blacks were a decade or two ago, the Jews somewhat earlier, et cetera. No minority ever fully relaxes its guard, but eventually



its members learn to stop being quite so touchy where it doesn't count.)

And — minority sensitivities or no — it is not the job of the artist to be nice to people. We are not social workers. We are not therapists. We are not crusaders. We are tellers of tales, inventors of fiction. What we offer is not comfort but vision. Not all the visions are cuddly ones. There is a substantial segment of the science fiction audience that wants cuddly visions, and is getting them in the movies. (Cf. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Star Wars*, et cetera, et cetera, where nobody ever gets seriously hurt and emotional conflict is purely on the eighth-grade level.) Fine. Their needs should be met too. The creator of non-cuddly art has enough problems, though, without having to worry about whether he's offending minorities. Homer offended minorities. Proust offended minorities. Joyce offended minorities. Write to them, if you like. Leave me alone.

I replied to Gay Community News somewhat sadly that I thought their remarks about me were "wrongheaded and unfair," going on to say, "In the old days before gays had come out and become a political force, one of the most delightful aspects of them, for me, was their sense of humor, that is, their awareness of the absurdity of everyday life and their clear-eyed perspective on contemporary nonsense. [A bit of a stereotype too, I must add.] Evidently when one is politicized one loses some of one's balance, for a lot of what comes out of the gay community now strikes me as humorless, dour, oversensitive, and just plain silly. . .

"The remarks on my own writing, though generally complimentary, annoy me where I'm accused of relying on 'cartoon figures,' as when I have a gang of jive-talking black basketball players beat a man unconscious, or where I portray a gay character as 'purely vicious and evil.' With your help I now realize that in the real world no blacks ever commit violence and all homosexuals are people of the most saintly character; and I'll endeavor not to portray them otherwise in future work lest I deviate into stereotypes again. I thank you for this valuable corrective sermon: one of my goals as a writer is to portray character with honesty, and I would not want to distort anything by departing from approved modes of minority behavior. Incidentally, the footnoted remark is the first comment

I've had from the gay community in any way critical of *Book of Skulls*. Jeez, folks, try to remember how to laugh! At yourselves first, then at the rest of the universe."

Perhaps it's a matter of timing. When Hitler's minions were stuffing Jews into the ovens at Buchenwald, it was not the appropriate moment to talk about Jewish moneylenders and landlords, Jewish noses, Jewish accents — only Jewish intelligence, Jewish stoicism, Jewish culture. Gays, having been ostracized by all right-thinking straights for so long, have now begun to emerge as respectable human beings in some parts of our society for the first time, and they will hear nothing said against any of their kind right now. So too with women, so too with Chicanos, so too with — well, fill in the blanks yourselves.

Well and good. Putting aside racism and sexism is part of our growing up as a civilization, and long overdue. But the writers of science fiction — at least, this one — are not going to be agents of the revolution. We reserve the right — at least, I do — to call 'em as we see 'em. Stories are still about conflicts; people in conflict are imperfect people; some of the guys with flaws are going to be gay. If members of minorities don't care for such realism, let them clean up their acts. After all, nobody writes stories about macho Zen monks who lie and cheat and rape and loot. (I think.) ●

Robert Silverberg

#### SF: Why We Read It

What relief at last

To meet in green bulk and stench

The terrors cloaked inside,

Yesterday released only on the analytic couch.

Shaped in strange mud,

Violent forms, chittering

With frantic energy beneath

Pale yellow, quilted skies.

A blister on the mind,

This need for darkness. Lanced

By voyages to the coolly distant,

The comfortably weird. But with acrid pincer

The twisted thing cuts quick

To bones unsuspected.

— Gregory Benford

# The Interstellar Connection

Book Reviews

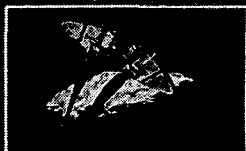
## Tom Staicar

**The Arbor House Treasury of Great Science Fiction Short Novels** compiled by Robert Silverberg and Martin H. Greenberg (Arbor House, hardcover, \$19.95; trade paperback, \$9.95); also SF Book Club edition. There's no way to get more for your sf reading dollars than by purchasing this one (and its companion volume of short stories). Three-quarters of a million words, fifteen uncut novellas, and 768 pages make up this large volume, and the writers are not exactly unknowns, either: Jack Vance, James Tiptree, Jr., Isaac Asimov, John Varley, Theodore Sturgeon, Samuel R. Delany, and more.

**A Treasury of Modern Fantasy** edited by Terry Carr and Martin H. Greenberg (Avon, trade paperback, \$8.95) displays the quality found in all Terry Carr anthologies: good taste. Culled from the fantasy magazines only (no books or mainstream magazines allowed), the book is a blend of horror, high fantasy, and tales which represent the best of the genre regardless of category. Lovecraft, Bradbury, Block, Leiber, Farmer and others are shown at the peak of their literary form, in stories from *Fantastic*, *Weird Tales*, *The Magazine of Fantasy & SF*, and other magazines. Don't miss this unusually fine collection of stories.

**Fantasy Annual III** edited by Terry Carr (Timescape, \$2.95) is Carr's latest selection of the best fantasy short stories of the year (in this case 1979). First book publication of Stephen King's "The Crate" and fantasies by Leiber, Brunner, Card, and Suzy McKee Charnas make this the usual, expected, Terry Carr *tour de force* anthology.

# ISAAC ASIMOV PRESENTS THE GREAT SF STORIES 5 (1943)



EDITED BY ISAAC ASIMOV  
AND MARTIN H. GREENBERG

**Isaac Asimov Presents the Great SF Stories #5 (1943)** edited by Isaac Asimov and Martin H. Greenberg (DAW, \$2.75). Locating and selecting the dozens of stories to compile a series of volumes which constitute the best of sf from the year 1939 onward takes a pair of editors with taste, unmatched knowledge of the field, and memories which could give an IBM computer a run for its silicone chips. Asimov and Greenberg fill the bill quite well as they present one of the best-balanced and most complete series of sf anthologies ever published. The non-sf events of each year are recounted in a brief introduction, followed by stories by Kuttner, Moore, Brackett, Hamilton, Heinlein, and many more. This would be a good time to order all five volumes from DAW before they are no longer available. You will seldom get the chance to read so many good stories in one series.

**Elidor** by Alan Garner (Del Rey, \$1.95). First published in England, *Elidor* is a fantasy classic. Four children of the Watson family are walking through a deserted and rundown section of Manchester, England, when they unwittingly pass through a portal into another universe. Their world of Elidor coexists with ours, linked only in a few places, such as the entrance to the castle where the children find themselves. The

eerie sound of a violin leads them to Maleborn, who enlists their aid against the malevolent forces which have conspired to extinguish the light in Elidor. Taking four "treasures" back home with them (a cup, sword, spear, and stone), the children find their homelife disrupted: their father's electric shaver turns itself on without being plugged-in, their favorite TV shows are ruined by interference, and weird static charges are being built-up around their treasures. All this is due to the energy emanations inherent in the Elidor treasures. Fantasy readers will enjoy this imaginative Garner novel.

**Science Fiction Book Review Index, 1974-1979** edited by H.W. Hall (Gale Research, hardcover, \$78.00) is an indispensable reference tool which should be part of every library's collection. Researchers, students, and general readers can utilize its authoritative contents, as they did with the earlier volume (covering 1923-1973). H.W. Hall's SFBRI has compiled the review appearances of 15,600 different book reviews drawn from nearly 250 general and sf publications. Anyone who wants to know the reviewers' reactions to any of 6,200 books (or who merely wants to find out which books a certain writer had in print during the period), can consult the entries in this massive volume. It is noteworthy that more sf book reviews appeared in the period of five years than in the first volume's fifty-year span.

**Analog's Golden Anniversary Anthology** edited by Stanley Schmidt (Dial Press, hardcover, \$10.95) is a chronological tour through the history of the second oldest sf magazine still running (you're reading the oldest now). Non-fiction by John W. Campbell and L. Sprague de Camp supplement the stories such as Fredric Brown's "Placet Is a Crazy Place" and Ted Reynolds' 1979 tale "Can These Bones Live?"

**Nebula Winners Fifteen** edited by Frank Herbert (Harper & Row, hardcover, \$12.95) is the latest annual from the SF Writers of America, presenting the Nebula Award winners such as Barry Longyear's "Enemy Mine," "giANTS" by Edward Bryant, and "Sandkings" by George R.R. Martin, along with essays by Ben Bova and Vonda McIntyre and several pieces of fic-

tion by runners-up for the award. A must-buy collection each year.

# NEBULA WINNERS FIFTEEN

## FRANK HERBERT

**The Works of Philip K. Dick**, published by Gregg Press (Division of G.K. Hall, 70 Lincoln St., Boston, MA 02111). "I have never had too high a regard for what is generally called 'reality.' Reality, to me, is not something that you perceive, but something you make. You create it more rapidly than it creates you." Those words were spoken by Philip K. Dick, science fiction writer extraordinaire, author of some of the most thought-provoking books in any field of writing. Dick had to scrap and fight his way up, writing Ace paperbacks at one time for pittance, snubbed universally by critics and ignored by most of the reading public. He began making some headway when recognition came in the form of the Hugo Award for *The Man in the High Castle* (1962). That alternate world masterpiece brought critical acclaim and boosted Dick's book sales. The Phil Dick cult had begun forming on its own, one member at a time, a long time earlier, however. *Ubik*, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, *Time Out of Joint*, *Eye in the Sky*, *Solar Lottery*, and many others formed the basis of his readers' lasting devotion as each Dick fan found a particular book which brought him or her into the fold to stay. His unique

way of looking at reality — or realities — set him apart from the other authors.

Gregg Press now has available the cream of Dick's works in green-bound uniform editions. These are library bindings with acid-free high-quality paper and the author's signature stamped in gold across the front covers — a far cry from the early piggy-back Ace Doubles of their first publication in some instances. I urge you to at least send for the descriptive brochure for this important set. The prices might sound steep at first, but these are long-lasting, well-made volumes by an important author, published by the company that makes most other hardcover wares seem like paperbound newsprint in comparison. Urge your local library to purchase these.

Look what the set consists of: one short story collection (*A Handful of Darkness*) and thirteen novels including such Dick extravaganzas as *The World Jones Made*, *Clans of the Alphane Moon*, *Dr. Bloodmoney*, *The Game-Players of Titan*, *The Man in the High Castle*, and more. Each book includes a new, specially-written introduction by such people as Norman Spinrad, Robert Silverberg, Sandra Miesel, and Paul Williams.

Whether setting up his ordinary, everyday people as fall-guys in intergalactic or interdimensional takeover conspiracies, or describing a breakdown of the fabric which holds together the laws of the universe, Philip K. Dick is a master. *The Game-Players of Titan* begins with a man's car refusing to let him drive it because the man has had too much to drink. *The Man in the High Castle* epitomizes the Dick approach to alternate realities as he describes a world in which the Nazis defeated the Allies in World War II and now share control of the occupied U.S. with the Japanese.

Few Dick characters are true "heroes" although most of them are struggling mightily to find some kind of salvation in the face of desperate odds. Riddled with faults and failings, they have names like Ragle Gumm and Joe Chip. A dozen viewpoint characters in a single novel is not unusual for this author, often characters with conflicting views of reality. Reality is always subject to change or obliteration without notice.

Dick has long challenged the basic assumptions of science fiction, such as the muscular, competent Earth hero defeating the always-evil aliens. He has delighted in

shaking up value systems and turning situations inside-out if it suits his purposes. Now the subject of academic studies in Europe and America, his work seems to be reaching the popular audience as well. Norman Spinrad made the following prediction in this Gregg Press introduction to *Dr. Bloodmoney*: "Let a fellow science fiction writer prophesy that when all the critics, salesmen, and hype have long since passed away, and our great-grandchildren are looking back on the literary art of their ancestors, these visionary and humane novels will speak for themselves and for who we were and what we thought we could be long after most of what we honor today has reached the dustbin of history."

Anthologies lately have been coming on fast and furiously, some of them apparently the products of the late-night musings of overworked editorial minds who believe they can shoehorn any story into a book somehow. I wouldn't be surprised to find books like *Fifty Nicaraguan Novellas of SF* or *Great SF Stories Involving Frozen Vegetables* in a publisher's announcement soon.

Some anthologies are as valuable as ever, and the following is a brief round-up of highly recommended ones which are all bargains at today's book prices:





**Rime of the Ancient Mariner** by Greg Irons (\$12.00) is one of the offerings of Schanes and Schanes in that company's distinguished series of art prints. Irons' drawings depict scenes from the bizarre Coleridge work. Alicia Austin, one of my personal favorites, has completed a portfolio containing her impressions of **The Forgotten Beasts of Eld** (\$15.00) while Josh Kirby has contributed a color portfolio which brings to life a religious sf allegory called **Voyage of the Aye-guy** (\$35.00).

Lela Dowling is a California artist who previously illustrated editions of works by Zelazny and Vance. She encountered

resistance from her parents when she embarked upon her career as an artist, but this all changed when she returned from a worldcon with \$800 in her pockets — earned from her artwork. Her portfolio is called *Unicorns*.

If you enjoy sf and fantasy art at all, you will find these art prints unusual and quite striking. Each portfolio is published in a limited edition only, tending to increase the rarity and value of the works you purchase. Send for details to: Schanes and Schanes, P.O. Box 99217, San Diego, CA 92109.

## A Conversation with Algis Budrys

novelist, short story  
craftsman, editor  
and genre critic. . .

**Darrell Schweitzer**

RARELY DOES the science fiction community completely agree on anything, but probably more than anyone else, sf professionals and fans will point to Algis Budrys as the best critic currently active, on the basis of his thoughtful essays in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. His "On Writing" columns in *Locus* are among the most useful such material available to the new writer. He has been selling short fiction since 1952, and his first novel appeared in one form as *False Night* in 1954, and

another as *Some Will Not Die* in 1961. (This later version, superior and unmangled, is now in print from Starblaze Books and from Dell.) His second novel, *Who?* (1958, and now available from Gregg Press) is an astonishing problem story about identity, sensitively characterized, suspenseful as a thriller, and intelligently focused on a very major issue. It and *Rogue Moon* (1960, in print from Avon and the SF Book Club) are his best known works. In the 1960s he wrote some short fiction, a novel, *The Iron Thorn* (1967) and regular book reviews for *Galaxy*. A major re-entry into the fiction arena was *Michaelmas* (1977, Berkley), which was received with much acclaim. A recent collection of short stories was *Blood & Burning* (Berkley). One is tempted to say that an overall evaluation of his work is overdue, but, since he will presumably be writing for years to come, it might be best to wait. The subject can only get richer.

**AMAZING:** Recently in a speech you defined the difference between speculative fiction and other fiction as that between an ordinary character in an unusual setting and an unusual character in an ordinary setting. As I heard this, it occurred to me: where does *Who?* fit in? It has an unusual character in a relatively ordinary setting, and still it's speculative fiction.

**BUDRYS:** If you consider that the rather ordinary human being is trapped inside his own setting and carries it around with him, then it all comes clear.

**AMAZING:** Setting in the sense of personal condition and psychological state, rather than geography?

**BUDRYS:** Yeah.

**AMAZING:** Did that book start for you with an idea of the overall plot, or with the image of the man with the featureless metal face?

**BUDRYS:** It started literally with the image. I was doing a lot of work for *Fantastic Universe* magazine, which bought covers without their being tied to any particular story. I turned a corner in their offices, and there was the Kelly Freas painting, which subsequently ran on the cover of the magazine, and which was later adapted for the Lancer Books paperback edition of the novel. It also appears in Kelly's art book. I just immediately captured my imagination entirely, and I had to write a story around it, which was contrary to the magazine's policy. They never had a story that fit the cover, but I wrote one anyway. It was a short story, set on the Moon, and it had a very weak, trick ending, but it had the basic situation in it. And they ran it. About six months later I realized I could build an entire novel around that character and that situation if I pulled it off the Moon and threw away the weak trick ending. I went to a book publisher with the idea and got a contract on it.

**AMAZING:** This book brings up the subject of books dating, and then not dating. It seems very contemporary, except parts take place in a sort of alternate 1960's, with no Hippies or Vietnam War. Is it dating, or is it just now slipping back into seeming more contemporary than it used to be?

**BUDRYS:** Obviously it is dating to some extent. In the Ballantine Books edition five

years ago, I had to insert references to a brief Russo-Chinese war that nobody in the West understood the outcome of. The purpose of that was to reintroduce the credibility of having Asiatics in contact with my protagonists. I had to find some way to get the Chinese back into the story, even though the Chinese and the Russians had split since the book had been written. As far as missing the Vietnam War, there are a lot of copious references to civil unrest, and a lot of military unrest. It's kind of generalized, but it was put into the book because I could see it coming. One thing that's not dating but will date, was that in a book written in 1954 I predicted \$.75 packs of cigarettes, \$.50 bus fares, all these things that when the book first came out would catch the reader's eye and keep reminding him that the book was set 20 years in the future. Now the future has arrived and I hit it exactly right. I even predicted that they would make a major motion picture out of the life of Cleopatra, only I called it *Queen of Egypt* instead of *Cleopatra*. So there are things in it that should have dated but haven't. Still, I think it is getting to the point now that, unless I can make the transition to being H.G. Wells, where it doesn't matter that the story of *The Invisible Man* is set in the 19th Century, the book's going to date out from under me.

**AMAZING:** It seems to me that as long as you have two political blocks in tension, the rest will take care of itself, because this is a very personal story. Which brings us back to the matter of the unusual character in the ordinary setting, which you say is a feature of fiction other than speculative fiction. This time you don't seem to be following the rule.

**BUDRYS:** Well actually I do follow it. But if you'll take a look, the central character of *Who?* is this prosthetically altered human being, and it's a way of individualizing him while still falling within the parameters of speculative fiction. The central character of *Rogue Moon* is an outright raving maniac by any mundane assessment of his character. As a matter of fact, all of them are. They're just different kinds of maniacs. The central character of *The Iron Thorn* is essentially Tarzan the Ape-man. The central character of *Michaelmas* is the master of the world. These are ways of introducing a well-rounded character into a kind of literature in which it is extremely difficult to

deal with a truly individualized protagonist, because if you do that you stand a very real risk of confusing the hell out of the reader who does not understand why the hell the character is doing what he is doing.

**AMAZING:** Many people complain that there are too many flat characters in science fiction, I suspect because it is true. Is this because of the inherent difficulties of the form, or because the authors aren't trying?

**BUDRYS:** Well, in the length of time I have been hearing that remark — it must have been 40 years now — I'm sure hundreds of writers have deliberately tried. What I'm saying is that the organics of the field, the very nature of it, make it extremely difficult to truly individualize the protagonist. Now, with various kinds of skills, with various degrees of skills, you can come close. But I think the nature of the field is such that it may be wiser — for the benefit of the average reader — if the average writer devotes all of his inventiveness to the background, and sketches in an acceptable character, a character much like those who have proven popular in the past, I don't think that's bad. In other words, I don't think this is an imposed rule at all. I think it is something which springs organically from the nature of speculative fiction.

**AMAZING:** Then does the classic complaint of the mainstream or academic critic come from a failure to understand the nature of speculative fiction?

**BUDRYS:** Yes.

**AMAZING:** Does all this constant examination of the nature of the field in criticism affect the way you write? Does it make you write better?

**BUDRYS:** It makes me write better criticism. I don't think it has any effect on my fiction one way or the other.

**AMAZING:** What should a critic accomplish?

**BUDRYS:** I think that the kind of critic I am, which is essentially a book reviewer who sometimes glorifies his reviews into a semblance of critical essay writing — I think his mission is to give the reader a chance to judge whether a book is worth buying or not, to present to the readership over a period of time a consistent and coherent view of the state of the art, and of trends

within the art, and a historical basis of the art. In other words to be a kind of informal historian who keeps updating the history.

**AMAZING:** Then this would mean that criticism is either retrospective or dealing with what is presently being written, but it never leads?

**BUDRYS:** I don't think the kind of criticism I'm talking about can lead. Perhaps some types of academic criticism, in which you go into the eschatology of these things and take a nice forensic approach, and start constructing theoretical structures which can sometimes be very convincing, might persuade one or two writers to deliberately write in such a fashion. If one of those writers happens to be a genius, you might even be able to create something which makes a strong impression on the field. I don't think that happens very often, and I think that art that is written to theoretical specifications is usually very awkward. It's bum art. This is why I said that my critical studies and my critical writing don't affect my fiction at all, because I've deliberately compartmentalized the two things. I think all writers should do that. I think that in a book review, when you address a particular writer, unless you're giving him specific nuts and bolts advice, like "Charlie, you're using too many adverbs," any broad-stroke, generalized advice you may be giving him is actually directed at the reader and at other writers. It is not really directed at the nominal target, because if he starts listening to you, you've done him a lot of harm.

**AMAZING:** Then do broad critical theories mean anything at all?

**BUDRYS:** Well, yeah. Every once in a while in the French Foreign Legion, they used to shoot a criminal, just somebody who had committed some sort of offense against the uniform code of military justice, and they did it *pour encourager les autres*, to encourage the others, or to put heart into the others. You do these things for the benefit of the apprentices, for the benefit of the interested non-professionals, for the guidance of future historians, and I think that's where the value lies.

**AMAZING:** Have you ever found the criticism of your own work to be particularly helpful or harmful?

**BUDRYS:** Not to me as a writer. I don't think any critic has ever said anything to me at any point that has changed by a fraction the way that I write or the things that I write about. What happens is that when you get egoboo from some source that you respect, it heartens you, and it gives you a certain amount of confidence. It also helps to sustain you over the course of a longish career, if you keep track of how often the critics have been wrong. In my case, for instance, it has been extremely heartening. When I wrote *Rogue Moon* and it first appeared — and *Rogue Moon* is of course now a classic; everybody now agrees to that, or else they are keeping mum about it — the general statement was, "This wild and incoherent book is a major disappointment from the author of *Who?* which this book in no way resembles, and we're terribly sorry to see this young man throwing away the promise that was expressed in his earlier novel." Okay? All right, fifteen years go by, and I bring out *Michaelmas*, and now it's, "This novel is a strange departure for the author of that classic, *Rogue Moon*, etc. etc." So the fact that major parts of the science fiction community, as distinguished from the mundane community, failed to read and understand the ending of *Michaelmas* does not bother me very much, because they failed to read and understand *Rogue Moon* and then ten years later they put me in the Science Fiction Hall of Fame for it.

**AMAZING:** What was the overall response to *The Iron Thorn*? I recall letters in *If* after the serial had appeared saying, "Oh, the old decadent Earth ending again." Was this typical?

**BUDRYS:** That's one of those books that I probably shouldn't have written the way I did. But if you happen to be a young novelist or a young artist or a young musician, you probably ought to read that book. I think you might find it's a very good novel. It's about what it's like to be an artist, and the terrible things the world does to you.

**AMAZING:** To backtrack a great deal, how did you first become interested in science fiction?

**BUDRYS:** Okay, I was predisposed toward science fiction by having the first three books I'd ever read or had read to me be *Night Flight* and *Wind, Sand and Stars* by Saint-Exupéry, and the full Defoe text of

*Robinson Crusoe*, all of which are either technophile books, or, Defoe's book is actually — sometimes in my classes I even refer to it as such — proto-science fiction or proto-speculative fiction. It has many of the characteristics of science fiction. And then when I got into the second grade in PS 87 in New York, they were circulating a magazine called *Young America*, which for some reason or the other was reprinting what seemed to be a lot of juvenile science fiction, a couple of Carl H. Claudy short stories. At *The Earth's Core* was serialized in it. From that I went to *Planet Comics*. I very quickly began haunting the libraries for anything that had a speculative element to it. The first thing I ever created was a four-panel comic strip called "BRGA," which was pencilled on the endpapers of my *Robinson Crusoe*. There was this little one-man flitter shooting around among the stars and planets. So I was off. By the time I was eight or nine I had discovered most of the pulp magazines, and there was no doubt in my mind. When I was nine I wrote my first story.

**AMAZING:** When did you actually realize you were going to be a writer, as opposed to attempting your first story?

**BUDRYS:** Right then.

**AMAZING:** Did you work continuously from then on?

**BUDRYS:** Yeah. I didn't vow any big oath at the age of nine, but it was obviously something I was strong at. It was something I could do that nobody else I knew could do as well as I did. By the time I was eleven I was collecting rejection slips and I was bound and determined. There was no question in my mind whatsoever. I was going to be a science fiction writer. Everything I did aimed at that. Everything.

**AMAZING:** How long till it started to look like you were going to start selling?

**BUDRYS:** In every writing club or class I was ever in, I was always the best, and I figured that put the odds on my side, that at any given stage of development I was above average. Then when I was about seventeen or eighteen, I began writing stuff that read pretty good to me. It didn't seem to have any major, obvious flaws in it. Chunks of it appeared to me to be fully satisfactory. And that was the kind of reac-



tion I began getting from the editors, too. I began getting back letters and little notes instead of printed slips. A few months before my twenty-first birthday, I got a note from Jerry Bixby, who was then the associate editor at *Startling* and *Thrilling Wonder*, saying that he'd read the story of mine, he'd liked it, and wanted to buy it, but Sam Mines, his boss, had vetoed it. But Jerry felt that if I made one simple change in the manuscript, I could surely sell it somewhere. In fact that is the story that I eventually sold to *Astounding*, my first sale there. They'd bounced it once, but it went in the second time in a Frederik Pohl Literary Agency folder, because Jerry had brought me around to Horace Gold's apartment. We were all playing poker together. I had met Fred, and Jerry recommended me to him as a client even though I had never sold anything. Fred took me on and, sure enough, starting in March of 1952, I was selling at least one short story a month, and sometimes showing a higher frequency than that. I sold my first novelette sometime toward the end of that year, and I had a contract for my first novel sometime around the beginning of 1953. It was a nice, steady progression. So, from about the age of 20, there was no doubt in my mind that I was already, in a sense, part of the professional establishment.

**AMAZING:** When the story went to *Astounding* the second time, had the change Bixby suggested been made, or was it exactly the same story in a Pohl folder?

**BUDRYS:** The change was made. There was a scene in which a guy's buddy gets a sledgehammer right through his space helmet, and the protagonist, I think quite naturally and normally, throws up at this spectacle. But that was in poor taste in those days, so out it went, and the story sold, otherwise unchanged.

**AMAZING:** Do you think the agent made a big difference? I can imagine all the paranoid would-be writers out there who will read this interview and say, "Oh, he did it because he had an agent. I haven't got one, so I can't."

**BUDRYS:** To a degree that's probably true. I think it was easier for me to start selling in high volume, not only because my stories were coming in in a nice bright red agency folder by agency messenger, in-

stead of in the slush mail, but because I had the consistent advice, encouragement and nagging of my agent behind me, who kept giving me directions, and beating me about the face when I was lazy, doing all sorts of things. I had a mentor at that time, a coach. Playing poker with Horace Gold every Friday and meeting half of the editors and writers in town didn't hurt either. I tell you it's not *necessary* to do it that way. In fact, the common rule of thumb is that any agent you can get before you're published is an agent that's not worth having.

**AMAZING:** What do you think would have happened if there'd been a Clarion Workshop back then?

**BUDRYS:** I don't know if I would have gone. Too poor. But let's assume I would have. I think I would have gotten a lot of encouragement from Damon Knight and some of the other writers, and roughly the same thing would have occurred.

**AMAZING:** How much writing technique do you think can actually be taught usefully, in the sense that you take someone who hasn't got it, and you teach him, and then he does and his stories get better.

**BUDRYS:** It depends entirely on the individual. Some people who are potentially good writers are organized to see a story as a dynamic mechanism, as a kind of device for transmitting fiction to the reader's head. Those are the people that very quickly assemble tips on technique and very quickly learn to apply them. They may not show immediate, dramatic improvement to a professional level overnight, but they will show signs of having assimilated it. In a few months or a very few years, their work will have reached a professional standard in that respect. There are other writers for whom this approach is not personally useful. They're just not organized inside to think in terms of mechanism when they think in terms of story. They think in terms, apparently, or some kind of personal emotional experience. What I'm saying is that this view is the one that's paramount in their minds. We're all aware of the fact that it's an emotional experience. We're all aware of the fact that it's mechanism. In fact, there's a balance. But some of us respond primarily to one aspect or another. For the people who have to feel their way through a story, nevertheless, it will do them no harm, and it

will help them if they get editing jobs. It will help them to talk with other writers. And writers occasionally change their orientation. A couple years from now they might be ready to use what they've learned.

**AMAZING:** It seems to me that there's a danger that these people will never become objective enough to tell if the technique is any good. If the emotion is there for them that may be enough, and they may just freeze in that position.

**BUDRYS:** Well, they may. I'm positive that Clarion does some harm to some writers. I believe, or I wouldn't have taught there, that it does much more good than it does harm. There is no question in my mind that some people get discouraged or frozen. There's no way to tell how many of them never should have been there in the first place, would never have made it anyhow. So that's an imponderable. I know that some particular instructors have damn near destroyed an entire workshop in a week's time with the techniques that they've applied. Those instructors hopefully have been weeded out. But if the basic question is, "Is Clarion any good?" the answer is firmly, "Yes." Does Clarion produce a cadre of younger writers who are more sophisticated and more knowledgeable at an earlier age than they otherwise would have been? Again, yes.

**AMAZING:** How did you conduct things when you were there?

**BUDRYS:** I usually teach early in the six-week course, usually the second or third week. The first week is always taught by Robin Wilson, who is very nuts and bolts. He takes a very workmanlike approach, and hands them the basics. In the last couple years he has also been relying on a manual written by Damon Knight, which is full of nuts and bolts. Every conceivable nut and bolt, from how to type a manuscript to how to make copyediting marks, and a lot of practical and theoretical stuff in between. My job is to create a transition from this — to embed it more firmly in their consciousness and show them how it works — and move them toward some of the later instructors who are going to be talking to them in terms of self-expression, and finding an individual mode of writing. So my stuff is half-and-half. I start out by talking about the seven parts of a story. I define

what you mean by beginning, middle, and end. I give them some rules of thumb for systematically examining a story that feels wrong, to find out where the problem is. I acquaint them with the idea that just because the ending feels bad, the ending may not be the part you want to rewrite. The problem may actually be in the middle where you didn't properly set up the ending. That kind of thing. I just expose them to the idea that a story is not inviolate, and in particular that a manuscript is not inviolate. You do go back and cut here and add features there, and you're not committed to anything until you finally come out with a manuscript that represents the story you're sure is finished. That's a startling idea to many young writers, and it's time they heard it.

**AMAZING:** What do you think would have happened if early in your career very heavyweight critics had proclaimed you the genius of the age and had started writing texts on your first two novels? What can that do to a young writer?

**BUDRYS:** I have no idea, and frankly this is something that preyed on my mind, as I'm sure it preys on the mind of every young writer, because all young writers are constantly teasing their minds with this kind of sweet fear. The thing I would have liked to have seen my writing do was make me rich. That I would have liked to see, to have it propel me into income levels such that I wouldn't have to worry about going out and getting a job.

**AMAZING:** Well, that wasn't too possible for an sf writer in the 1950s.

**BUDRYS:** It was barely possible, but not too possible.

**AMAZING:** Do you think the '50s was a good time to start writing science fiction?

**BUDRYS:** Yeah, for guys like me. But that's kind of begging the question, because I think guys like me came along as a result of the existence of 1940s type *Astounding* science fiction. That's a long thesis about which I am writing part of a book. I can't give you a compact answer here. But I think that many of us, Sheckley, Phil Dick, Mike Shaara — who is now coming back into the field and was a very hot article in the early '50s — a lot of us were in effect created, tailored into our roles by the experience of

reading *Astounding*, and therefore, when we arrived at the point where we became professionals, we arrived at the point for which nature and nurture had fitted us. So yeah, it was a ball. It was a lot of fun. There were constant economic worries, but, Good Lord, we felt like the young lions, all of us, and that's an awfully good feeling.

AMAZING: Did you find the field at all restrictive at this time? For instance, Donald Westlake left the field in the early '60s because he felt it was too staid and conservative. Did you feel any of that?

BUDRYS: No, I didn't. But then, first of all, all the other guys did, and I didn't because I was perfectly happy writing for John Campbell. I had something like twelve stories over a course of sixteen issues of *Astounding*. I saw Campbell at least once a week over a period of several years, and at least once a month over a period of five years. I was happy as a clam with Campbell. Phil Dick couldn't work with him. Sheckley didn't want to work with him. Shaara didn't want to work with him. Most of them were much more comfortable selling to *Galaxy*, but I didn't want to work with Horace Gold. I had worked for him as his assistant editor by then. But basically, I was a Campbell man, and as long as Campbell was effective, and Campbell and I were on the same wavelength, I could not have been happier.

AMAZING: Did writers get typed then the way they do now? Especially in the late '60s, if somebody sold two stories to Campbell, that made them "an Analog writer" which meant they were dismissed by everyone else.

BUDRYS: In the '50s if somebody said, "Oh, you're an *Astounding* writer," it was the equivalent of saying, "Oh, you do it for the best." There wasn't as much of this kind of categorizing and analysis going on. You gotta remember that Damon Knight's book, *In Search of Wonder*, which codified the whole idea of criticism of the genre from within, didn't come out until the middle 1950s. It wasn't until the 1960s that it became a matter of course that anybody who took the field seriously actually expressed that opinion in the form of critiques and book reviews. So in the '50s when I was getting started, there were very few people who were going around with this

kind of straightjacket to slip on you.

AMAZING: In that sense then, the '50s were less restrictive?

BUDRYS: In that sense. It was pretty damn restrictive if you didn't like working for Campbell, because then you were stuck with Horace Gold, and if you didn't like working for either one of them, then you were stuck with two-cent and one-cent-a-word markets.

AMAZING: Did Campbell feed you ideas and shape stories the way he did with a lot of other writers?

BUDRYS: Yes. He didn't shape stories very much, except by the tried and true method of bouncing the ones he didn't like, and from that you got an input that there were certain things you shouldn't do. He occasionally expressed something that might be interpreted as a helpful hint. But what he would do is sit there and toss ideas in general at you. He'd sit across the desk from you and have one, two, and three-hour conversations about the nature of, for instance, invulnerability. Campbell would ask a question like, "How would you create an invulnerable superman?" A truly invulnerable superman, someone who is proof against any form of attack. And eventually one or other of us worked around to the idea that it would be someone who would not be noticed, someone who would never be attacked. Then the question became, "Well, nevertheless, is this person vulnerable to something?" And out of that came stories like "Nobody Bothers Gus." About half the time I would just walk in cold with the idea. Some of my best-known, best-remembered *Astounding* stuff was never written for *Astounding*. It was bought by *Astounding* after the original market had for one reason or another not taken it. That's true of a novelette called "The End of Summer," which was my first *Astounding* cover story. It was written for a book called *Star Short Novels* that Fred Pohl was putting together. Fred bought it and the Ballantines bounced it, because my name wasn't big enough, and John Campbell bought it immediately. Another one was "The Executioner," which was written for *If* around a Kelly Freas cover painting. *If* bounced it because it had, quote, all that philosophy stuff in it, endquote. So Campbell bought it and ran it with Kelly Freas illustrations, but

with a Christmas cover. Simultaneously *If* published an issue with a story in it called "The Executioner" by Frank Riley, and the Kelly Freas cover around which I had written my story. So I would guess that with Campbell and me it was about fifty-fifty. I might as well state something that I have been not saying in public for a very long time. Back in the 1950s, had Campbell quit his job at that point, he would have named me his successor. That's how close we were.

**AMAZING:** What do you think would have happened if you had been editor of *Astounding/Analog* all these years?

**BUDRYS:** I'm very glad you asked me that. I wouldn't have been editor of *Astounding* for all these years. I would have botched it up in a matter of a year or two. I would have been terrible at it.

**AMAZING:** Because you didn't have his capacity for reading more bad science fiction than anyone who ever lived?

**BUDRYS:** That's not the hard part of editing, particularly not the hard part of editing a magazine like *Astounding* or *Analog*. You've got an entire personality for the magazine that has to be maintained. It can only be modified over a very long run. You have to be able to talk to people, contributors and readers, on a certain level and from a certain frame of reference. Despite Campbell's high opinion of me, I could not have done that at the time. I'm not sure I could do it now.

**AMAZING:** Campbell had a lot of science and pseudo-science hobbyhorses. They tended to get into people's stories. Did he ever try to get you to write a story based on, say, Dianetics, or his ideas on psionics?

**BUDRYS:** He didn't try to get me to do that kind of thing. Very occasionally I'd play with it, simply because it was interesting-looking grist for the mill, like the "Nobody Bothers Gus" superman who has this mysterious psionic power which makes him not noticed. And I did a double-barrelled satire on E.B. Cole's Philosophical Corps stories in which the benevolent Earthmen go and straighten out these backward planets undercover, and a psionics story at the same time. That eventually came out as a rather straight and rather undistinguished novelette called "Chain Reaction" by John

A. Sentry, which is just a straight, psionics Philosophical Corps story in a sense. But in the first draft it had a character who kept going around saying, "Right, Chief. Yes, Chief." That was all the dialogue he ever had, which was the function of any subsidiary character in any E.B. Cole Philosophical Corps story. And the names of all the alien characters were anagrams for the phrase, "I had one grunch but the eggplant over there." ((Laughs)) And if you look at "Chain Reaction," if you can find it anywhere, you'll find that there are still aliens in it with names like Chugren. But Campbell went blind to that story. He could not read it as a satire. He said, "Gee, it's a pretty good story but there are some weaknesses in it. You've got this character — you should know better — who says nothing but 'Yes, Chief,' and you really ought to fix that. Give him some more dialogue." So it was a rare occasion in which Campbell wanted to buy a story, gave me specific suggestions, and I wanted to sell the story badly enough that I followed those suggestions even though they were completely off the point of what I had been trying to do. Which is why I put Sentry's name on it instead of my own.

**AMAZING:** Did E.B. Cole ever catch on?

**BUDRYS:** I don't know. I don't know E.B. Cole from a hole in the wall. For all I know he never existed, or he was a voice that came out of a barrel. Actually I suspect that he was a very nice, sincere person who was thrilled to be able to write selling fiction and felt that he had developed quite a nice following in a very good market. It's one of those cases of somebody who could never sell to another editor, who flourished for a little while, and then vanished when *Analog* stopped publishing him.

**AMAZING:** I wonder how those cases work, because I know there still is a demand for the Philosophical Corps. In fact, the collection of those stories is a very sought-after book.

**BUDRYS:** What can I tell you? It's a sure-fire formula. Whenever you go you can fantasize that you're a secret agent of an advanced culture and that you're straightening out the poor backward planet. That's a fantasy that appeals strongly to many bright, speculative-fiction-prose teenagers, who are the way they are because they are



in fact displaced from the society in which they were born. So that kind of story has a very strong appeal to young readers, and I presume that that is the bulk of the E.B. Cole readership, whether they are chronologically young or not.

**AMAZING:** What I notice is that it's popular in fandom. I suspect this may be another manifestation of the fans-are-Slans fantasy. Which brings up another subject. Did you ever have anything to do with fandom before you became a professional?

**BUDRYS:** Oh yeah, I had a lot to do with it. I published two issues of a fanzine. Lin Carter as a matter of fact, was my first subscriber. I did a lot of letterhacking, and corresponded with a fair number of fans — fairly big name fans of the time. I went to the 1947 Philadelphia worldcon and some meetings of the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society, made a big trip up to New York at one time to go to a regional con there. Regional cons, mind you tended to have a total membership of 100. The Philadelphia worldcon of 1947 had a total membership of less than 175. But yeah, I was a member of the N3F, all kinds of things.

**AMAZING:** Did your being in fandom — as opposed to reading science fiction — have anything to do with your wanting to be a writer? You know how it can become social climbing in a fannish context.

**BUDRYS:** No, it wasn't like that. I had reached my decision to be a science fiction writer before I even knew there was such a thing as fandom. I knew there were letterhacks, but I had no idea there was anything like fandom. I revered the writers not as individuals, but as bylines. I never laid eyes on any professional writer of any kind until I went to the Philcon, and by that time they were old friends of mine in terms of their bylines. I never saw a fan react to the sight of a pro until '47, and by then I was 16, and I was well on my way.

**AMAZING:** We're almost to the end of the tape, so what have you got upcoming?

**BUDRYS:** Nothing that's going to surface immediately. I'm doing a lot of recasting and revising. And I'm doing this non-fiction critical stuff for Southern Illinois University Press. I'm doing something for the science fiction issue of Northwestern University's

*Triquarterly Literary Magazine* if that issue still has space open. I'm finishing up a contemporary novel about science, and Doubleday and I have a contract between us on an anecdotal book on bicycling. And we're working on the special Algis Budrys issue of *F&SF*. ●

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*Darrell Schweitzer is the author of the first sf interview book ever produced, SF Voices, published by T.K. Graphics in 1976. His first interview was with Gardner Dozois for a paper called (no kidding) The Daily Planet in 1974. Since then he has done about 40 more, several of which have appeared or will be appearing in Amazing.*

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## **HAIKU FOR A SINGULARITY**

Blue stars, black hole, pain  
sucking at bone's marrowed core;  
slow eternity.

## **HAIKU FOR DYSON'S SPHERE**

Dyson's megasphere,  
and galactic core a yolk:  
what awaits its birth?

## **HAIKU FOR THE MACROLIFERS**

Asteroid ship . . . seed  
cast by Orion's skyhook,  
the Pleiades sigh.

— Robert Frazier

# intercom

*Intercom seeks letters discussing ideas expressed in articles or fiction on our pages — or something that may be of general interest to our readers.*

Dear Elinor:

Panic! Confusion reigns! I am whelmed, definitely whelmed; neither over- nor under-; simply *whelmed* outta my mind.

On page 11 of the July 1981 issue of *Amazing*, Tom Stalcar says of me humble widdle self: "a writer who has never been content to make the safe moves or seek the secure position."

On page 36 of the Summer 1981 issue of *Science Fiction Review* (received the same day as the *Amazing* noted above), Bruce D. Arthurs says: "[Ellison] reached a peak in his writing, I feel, about five or six years ago, and I haven't found anything new in his work in any of the things I've read since then. It's *still* good, still marvelously intense gut-level writing, but he seems to have settled into a niche in which he may be one of the best, but isn't challenging himself to strike out into new niches."

Setting aside for a moment the compliments contained in each of these assessments, for which I am grateful, I looked back over what I've written in these last six years. The works include such fictions as "Croatoan," "Hitler Painted Roses," "Seeing," "The Diagnosis of Dr. D'arqueAngel," "From A To Z in the Chocolate Alphabet," "Jeffy is Five," the full novel version of "A Boy and His Dog" titled *Blood's A Rover*, "The Man Who was Heavily into Revenge," "All the Lies That Are My Life," "Count the Clock that Tells the Time," "All the Birds Come Home to Roost," "Shatterday," "Grail," "Django," "Broken Glass," "Opium" and "In the Fourth Year of the War." These, in addition to several dozen non-fiction pieces such as my columns in *Future Life* and my essay on gun control and the death of John Lennon in a recent *Heavy Metal*.

I don't suppose it does any good to say that the writing of some of these — particularly "All the Lies that Are My Life" — were enormously difficult and seemed to

me to be, at least as far as my oeuvre is concerned, serious departures... conscious efforts to "strike out into new niches," whatever that means. I was *reaching*.

Stagnation, like plagiarism, is something every writer fears. If Mr. Arthurs is correctly perceiving that I've peaked and have been coasting for at least six years, then I'm in deep trouble.

But I must admit that his words, in juxtaposition with Mr. Stalcar's have me whelmed as I have not been whelmed since, on the same day about six years ago, I received two reviews from two different sources, one of which referred to me as "the perennially angry young punk of the bizarre" and the other which opined "Ellison is getting a little long in the tooth to be called the *enfant terrible* of fantasy."

What is an insecure, looking-to-his-betters-for-evaluation writer to do? Like Jeffy, I seem locked, in the minds of some, in a never-ending childhood; while to others I am far over the hill and should be worrying whether my rocking chair faces *toward* the sun, or *away* from the sun.

If other writers out there feel the bite of the same dichotomy, I would appreciate their comments. Or at least references for acceptable nursing homes and/or kindergartens where a weary old, snappishly young, long-toothed and adolescent scrivener can go to wait out his second childhood or his twilight years... whichever comes first.

Exhaustedly, but exuberantly,

Harlan Ellison  
Sherman Oaks, CA

Dear Ms. Mavor,

As a struggling author, artist's agent and Director of SF and Fantasy Workshop, I just had to write and let you know what a fantastic job you've done. *Amazing* has been fully and completely revived into the lively well-produced magazine I'm sure its original founders meant it to be. Most important is your attitude, as an editor and editorially in the magazine itself, toward the beginning writer. Many of the fine editorials

and interviews in *Amazing* provide valuable background information of interest to hopeful writers, as well as inspiration and encouragement. And the fiction is, for the most part, a valid example of what the novice should strive for in his or her finished work. Good luck. You deserve all the success I honestly feel will be yours with *Amazing* in your hands.

Alan R. Bechtold  
SF and Fantasy Workshop  
8125 SW 21st, Topeka, KS 66615

PS: You might mention that I direct a group of more than one hundred writers of sf, fantasy and horror in all stages of career development. We have a monthly newsletter and exchange stories, critiques, information and etc. Any *Amazing* reader who would like to know more can find out by sending me a stamp.

Dear Ms. Mavor:

This may sound funny, but your rejection slip of my story "Mindclaws" gave me an uplift. Particularly encouraging was your comment that you would like to see more from me in six to eight months. A remark like that means a lot to a young writer like me. By October, which is six months from now, I should have a few more stories to send to you. In the meantime, I'll concentrate on trying to sell to the other magazines. But I would like you to know that *Amazing* has a special meaning to me now, thanks to your encouragement.

I would also like to congratulate you on obtaining Robert Silverberg's "Opinion" column. I've never seen a copy of *Galileo*, so I'm not sure what Silverberg has done with the column in the past, but his first for *Amazing*, in the May 1981 issue was quite interesting, and demonstrates one of the biggest problems in our society. When science fiction means to the general public *Star Wars* or *Buck Rogers*, then it is an indication the public does not understand science fiction at all. Furthermore, his observation that the majority of books on display were comic or art books, and his conclusion that reading is a declining skill is extremely disturbing, one that ought to get more attention.

Clinton Lawrence  
Davis, CA

Dear Ms. Mavor:

The letter from the unnamed author (May 1981) objecting to the way his story was rejected and mostly to the fact that it was, hit a sour note with me. Although I had an acceptance within my first month of writing, I have still had my share of rejections before and since just as all published and unpublished writers have from time to time.

However, I have found that editors have been very kind and quite fair when it comes to how an unpublished writer is treated. I've sent many stories off to you and your staff has always taken the time to comment personally on why it did not fit the editorial needs and at no time did it make me feel slighted or offended. All magazines have editorial needs and requirements; that's what makes them unique. Each writer should realize that the written word is not sacred enough to override such needs and each one of us, published or not, has to do rewrites occasionally. And, as for those who think that only published writers get attention: this, too, is also a fantasy. My first acceptance was from *Mike Shane* last year and with each acceptance, I've had to do some rewriting. I'm grateful to the wise editor who guides me into a polished story.

But, most especially, I object to his suggestion that he would buy a copy of *Amazing* if he could somehow be convinced of its worthiness. I'm absolutely floored that any "writer" would think along those lines. Perhaps he's unaware of what a competitive field this is. Rejections (I prefer to call them returns) and editorial policies go with the territory.

Thank you for letting me give my opinion and for having one of the finest magazines and editorial staffs in the country. Best always.

Vicki Carleton  
Lansing, MI

*We printed the unnamed writer's letter specifically as an object lesson in how "not-to-be" in this (or any other) business. Hostility rarely gets one anywhere. We appreciate your comments, Vicki. — EM*

Dear *Amazing*,

There is an interesting letter in the May 1981 issue. The author can't understand why you don't buy his stories, and won't

buy your magazine to find out what it is that you are buying.

I'd like to thank him for helping me out. I am also an aspiring sf writer (in fact, I have a story in the mail to you right now), and the less competition I have, the better the chances of selling my stories. But then again, if more people had that attitude, the quality of sf magazines would suffer.

Since I have no desire to encounter the problems that the above mentioned person has, I am enclosing \$25 for a three-year subscription, and an SASE so you can send me your story guidelines. Thank you.

Dale H. Emery  
Eielson AFB, AK

*This whole issue makes one ponder. If we deal decently with one another, won't we better be able to communicate? I think "yes." Also, how to spell out editorial needs in an eclectic publication like ours? Something well written that slaps you in the face? Or makes you weep? Or laugh? Also, how do we explain the human editorial factor — biorythms, Up Days, Dog Days — as something to be figured in story selection? Impossible. But maybe that's what makes the process so special. Hopefully. Thanks for your comments and subscription. — EM*

Dear Elinor,

The July *Amazing* is very impressive. I'm particularly delighted to appear in the same issue with Roger Zelazny, who is a writer I have admired for a long time, and who was a formative influence on my own work. I recall one of the things that made a big impression on me as a teenager was the serialization of "He Who Shapes" in *Amazing* (Jan-Feb 1965), which I got through the back issue department in the days when Ultimate was trying to sell off stocks of the Ziff-Davis issues at three or four for a dollar. You picked stories on a coupon, and if you picked a serial, you got an extra issue.

There are a couple of typos in "Raving Lunacy" (July 1981 *Amazing*) I'd like to clear up. The astute may notice that the Roman numeral date in the sheriff's summons and the date at the end of the story do not match. This is not to imply that the end of the story takes place a year before the beginning. Once somebody wrote an entire learned paper (it might have been a thesis) on such a transposition in Delany's

Delany's *Nova* because one of the place/date running heads was suddenly different. Delany didn't have the heart to tell that person it was a typo. You can never be too careful about these things. Also, I'm not sure who did it, but the typeface the sheriff was trying to vocalise is black letter, not "bold." Black letter is a kind of heavy, gothic typeface you see in old books. It's very hard to read. I've often wondered how I would prove my literacy if suddenly transported back to, say 1500, since, 1) I don't know Latin and 2) I can't read black letter.

I suppose we should mention to the newer readers that the Tom O'Bedlam series began with "Tom O'Bedlam's Night Out" in the Sept. 1977 *Fantastic*.

Re Bob Hawkins' promotional scheme, there's something we do at IASFM which you might consider. Encourage your authors to get themselves written up in local newspapers. All one has to do is write a publicity release, announcing that local author X has published a story in a national magazine, and that will probably get an interview or two. Next to "Scandal in Town Hall" and "Axe Murderer on the Loose," "Local Boy/Girl Makes Good" (ie. a local author getting published) is a perennial favorite of small town newspapers. My advice to authors on this is to insist that the reporter show you a copy of the article ahead of time. I once had a write-up which got every single factual item wrong. One could say it was... an, amazing, but no... it was a Weird Tale indeed.

By the way, Pat Spath to the contrary, I recommended Ryan's "Give Us This Day Our Daily Death" for a Nebula. It's recognizably human, which is a characteristic I don't see enough of in contemporary sf.

Darrell Schweitzer  
Stafford, PA

Dear Ms. Mavor:

Please find the enclosed SASE for a copy of your manuscript requirements and format; I thank you very much, in advance, for providing them.

Your May issue struck the shelves here in Canada with impact usually exhibited by lethal packages of much larger size. Unlike other explosives, however, your magazine did not blow all other reading matter from



the racks: it left them behind, and gathering dust.

The cover format alone announced that the magazine was different; a quick perusal of the innards let me know there was definitely something ticking between the covers. Now that I've read, and re-read the issue I understand why there are few chances of finding ASF on the stands three days after they're delivered. Thank Goddess for Zonk, and thank you for providing it. I can't fault you on your balance between Sci-fi and fantasy; your non-fiction was a good, leisurely read after the stories had been rapidly devoured. I believe the poetry's first reading even pleased me (although it took two more scrutinies to satisfy me, not being firmly grounded in instant appreciations). Yours is the first magazine in which I found pleasure in every aspect of its realization.

Northern sciencefiction, I'm certain, will never be the same. But don't take my word for it; there's a notable professor of science fiction still sitting of the shelf, wondering what's happened, and several of his peers are asking themselves the same thing right next to him.

Thank you again,

Robert Morouney  
Port Elgin, New Brunswick

*So how come we're not rich and famous?  
Well... one letter like this is worth all that!  
It feels good. Thank you! — EM*

#### Editors:

I usually enjoy the type of story you call a "zonker", but "The Action Hook" (May 1981) stunk. Even a zonker must adhere to some sort of structure, or make sense (even if only in a bizarre way), or at least be interesting or amusing. "The Action Hook" was none of the above.

I really hate to be continually critical, but I wasn't impressed by the rest of May's fiction selections, either. The bitterly realistic "Encounter" was good even though the idea is so depressing, but "The Greater Gift" had such a worn-out subject, done in such a worn-out way, that it was boring. "So I Was Born" got off to an excellent start, but out of the several directions the story might have taken, Jennings picked out the least interesting. "Project Purple" has horrible. I haven't read a literary bungle that bad since

leaving the creative writing workshops at ASU. I've never seen one in print. The technical mumbo-jumbo may be factual, but made absolutely no sense to me (and I've got an IQ of 160). If Jacobson is going to continue writing, he'd better study his Asimov and Niven to learn how to bring his scientific jargon down to the layman's knowledge level. As a literary piece, the story's ending was totally unjustified. It was never even hinted that Hastings was doing anything unethical or immoral enough to justify his being infected as the "last laugh"; nothing that hinted that "he'd get his in the end."

Steve Crowley

P.S. Landing Silverberg's "Opinion" was a big plus and the energy article was good. As critical as I've been, I believe *Amazing's* quality is on the upswing.

*Maybe you are just reading too fast. Second perusals may find more to offer in each of the stories criticised. Jacobson's story covers much in-the-news genetic engineering and the pompous, impetuous Hastings seemed to be begging for his colorful hue. We may be on a different wavelength, but we appreciate your giving us a chance. — EM*

Dear Ms. Mavor,

As a regular reader of the science fiction magazines currently on the racks, I have noticed that *Amazing* offers the readers something that the others do not — variety. Most of the others seem to be following a "formula" for their fiction whereas your magazine seems to say that there is room for all kinds of science fiction and fantasy, the only qualifying factor being that it be a good story.

I have been a reader of *Amazing* and *Fantastic* for more than a decade now, and I have seen the magazines hit peaks and valleys. The magazine now is definitely hitting a peak. And it seems that the quality goes up with each issue. The concern of you and your staff is evident in the quality of the stories and features.

The cover of the May 1981 issue was a beautiful work of art. Although it had nothing to do with any story inside, it told a complete story of its own.

"Opinion" by Bob Silverberg touched upon a subject which has worried me for several years. I am glad that someone has finally said something about the decline of printed science fiction.

"The Vampire of Mallworld" fascinated me by its ability to create an entire culture without having to take the time to explain everything to the reader. The characters accepted everything happening around them without feeling that they had to explain anything.

More than any other story which I have read in recent years, "The Greater Gift" created an alien which was actually an alien rather than just a person that looked different. Though the story was flawed (as every story is) the author did a good job in conveying the sheer alienness of the creature.

Finally, I am glad to see sf and fantasy poetry. I like poetry very much, but when poetry is printed in other sf mags (if ever) it is superficial and gimmicky. The poetry presented in this issue had meaning and depth and most of the poems carried some kind of emotional impact. And impact is the final test of all good poetry. No impact — nothing.

Only one complaint. Why put the title ("The Greater Gift") in the center of the page? It interrupts the eye flow.

Ralph E. Vaughan  
Chula Vista, CA

*Thanks for the kudos. The title in the middle of the page has something to do with visual variety and graphic design. I'll speak to the nutty art director about your complaint. Hey — six out of seven things isn't bad! — EM*

Dear Elinor:

Re: "Incidentally, is *Amazing* on sale in West Covina?"

A simple enough question, only the answer is as complicated as a Hieronymus Bosch painting, in fact; if Bosch were alive today he'd have copped himself plenty of deranged inspiration from my attempts to find copies of your magazine. (Idea: If I ever manage to commandeer a time machine, zip back to the 16th century, then have Hieronymus come along for a romp through darkest Southern California, some interesting paintings could result. If I can't

get ahold of a time machine, or Bosch, I'll just have to paint those twisted visions myself.) A .357 Magnum, and two similar girls in similar cars with similar license plates and the *Playboy* layout of Rita Ginrette all played parts in the search leading me to find the May '81 issue in a drug store across the street from a shopping mall which is clear on the other side of West Covina; damn near plain ol' Covina — an area where the houses are bigger and more expensive and there's no graffiti (punk or low rider) on the walls; but a hell of a lot closer than Temple City (you probably never heard of it, but it does exist) where I found a copy of the March issue!

West Covina seems to have something against me finding magazines I want in convenient locations. A cop once had me pull my rusty 10-speed into the gutter and asked me, "What are you doing in this area?" then gave me a ticket for not coming to a full stop at an intersection while I was searching for the Special Harlan Ellison issue of *F&SF*. Back when Hank Stine was holding a story of mine for over a year (after about six months I was informed that it was "still under consideration. Wild, crazy story."), I had to brave streets that my younger siblings are afraid to walk down, where the graffiti is thick and the asphalt oozes with broken beer bottles to find *Galaxy*. No wonder this place has so many jokes told about in on TV!

The May '81 issue should have been more widely distributed — it would have sold more. The Kent Bash cover was great; the sort of wit that has been missing on sf covers for years. It might have attracted the attention of a lot of sf enthusiasts in this town ("This is a heavy science fiction area," someone who ended up not hiring me said.). I hope those in other towns are attracted.

I really like what you're doing with *Amazing*. It's a pleasure to find an sf magazine that I can read and enjoy. More of that zonk, please! With all your stories, I'm at the very least entertained. This is why I'm sending you so many stories.

Speaking of those stories, are my other two still under consideration (I can always hope) or have you just not gotten to that part of the pile yet? Expect more manuscripts in six months.

Ernest Hogan  
West Covina, CA

Dear Elinor,

I do hope your new distributor is doing well for you nationwide; I can find only one place in affluent, cosmopolitan, well-read (among other things) Marin County to buy *Amazing*.

And your product is better. More interesting, too. Not like some magazines: the predictable three novelettes, five short stories. I like your variety: contrasting a March issue of 12 stories, and at the opposite pole, last August of four. More fun that way, and each issue had its flavor. Despite its interesting mix, though, I found the March issue not super high on content (to my taste). Lord knows, I've written long and written short; I think it's harder to write short and write well.

But I agree with Arthur's cover comment that your May issue was probably your best yet. The novel excerpt from *Windhaven* was superb. The only novel excerpt that I've read that delivers on the oft-made promise to stand on its own. I'll buy the novel — probably Tuttle/Martin's idea in submitting it. Interestingly, the short-short by their editor, Hank Stine, points up my thoughts on writing short. This was a good little one-page piece — but too long by one final sentence. He ought to give reader and editor credit for a little perception of their

own. I also liked the Sucharitkul piece; zany. High marks also for zingy cover art — more of that may boost circulation.

My writing plans (or lack of them) may well fit your bought-up situation. I'm probably off doing stories for the next six months. In May we're all going to Europe. My wife is Danish (and a very tough marathoner). We're both entered in the Copenhagen Marathon. I've been off marathoning for a while, but the prospect of 26 miles through the streets of Copenhagen (with Tuborg at the aid stations?) was enticing enough to get me up for it. But training for this so that you can enjoy it and not stagger through it — that takes time. So much for writing, meantime.

Joel Fruchtman  
**ARCHRIVAL**  
Kentfield, CA

*Thanks for writing and our best wishes for you and your wife in the Copenhagen Marathon! We hope many of our readers noticed your ad for sports equipment in our September issue. Here's to healthier readers and writers! — EM* ●

## THE VISIONARY COSMOGRAPHER

Surveying  
the celestial spaces  
with the aid  
of a kaleidoscope.

— Peter Payack



# Somtow Sucharitkul

This story later evolved into  
Sucharitkul's first novel, *Starship  
and Haiku*, forthcoming  
from Pocket Books.

## THE LAST LINE OF THE HAIKU

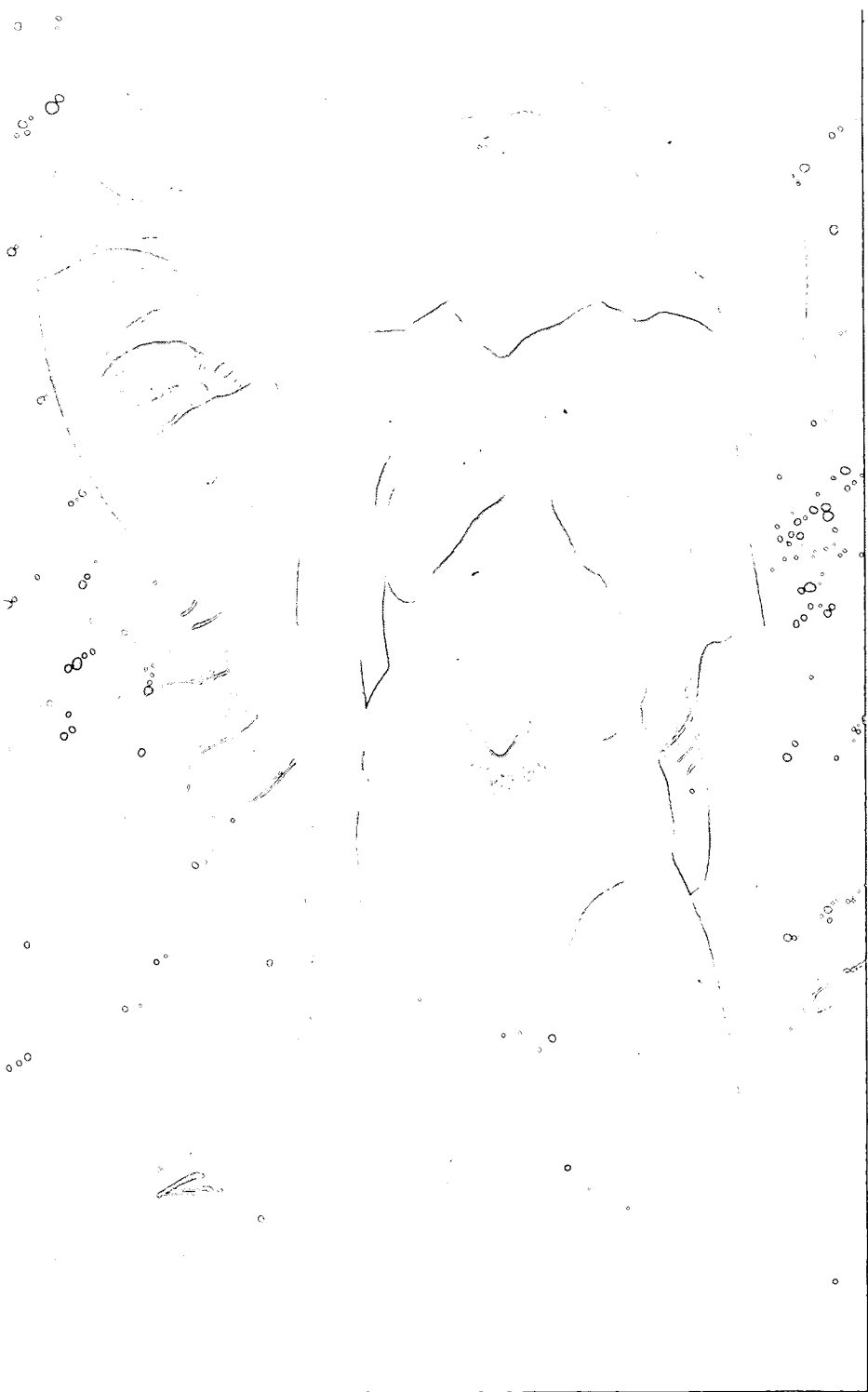
Illustrated by  
Gary Freeman

Spring, 2022

**T**he million-year silence between man and the whale was first broken on April 3rd, 2022. This did not result from the painstaking teamwork of cryptolinguists and zoologists, for humanity had for the most part given up such lines of research as did not meet its immediate and very urgent needs; nor was it some lone, half-crazed genius, struggling for decades to communicate with the great aliens who share

this planet, who was first to stumble upon one of the most well-concealed secrets of the universe. Instead, this story deals with a young, mildly attractive girl on her first journey abroad, aboard an insignificant fishing vessel (one of the few remaining of its kind) that set sail from Beppu, the City of Seven Hells as the long dead tourists called it, which is a port in the shadow of the volcano Asoyama, on the startlingly bright green island of Kyushu, a surprising jewel erupting from the poisoned Pacific.

Ryoko was alone on deck when it hap-





pened. She was following her father's command which was always to keep her eyes and ears open: *for there are whole continents outside Japan, my dear.* She had laughed inwardly at his solemnity; but went, an obedient girl.

They were far too respectful of her, though, since she was Minister Ishida's daughter, and so she had been lonely almost all the time. The first weeks she was sick every day and stayed in the vessel's one minimally sumptuous cabin which they had set aside for her. When she was better, they wanted to show her everything. The boat was powered by sail in the ancient way, and sometimes by electricity. It was, of course, no longer used for fishing. How it worked did not interest her, and she only wanted to see land again and not have to stand on a ground that swayed to a timeless music not of her choosing. So they left her mostly to herself.

Turning from their work, they would sometimes see her pass by, one hand caressing the soggy railings, humming some wailing melody from the classics, for she was quite a scholar; or she would be staring, hypnotized, at some imagined strip of land just beyond the boundaries of her vision.

This time she had been standing for nearly an hour. The boat was hardly moving. She stood stock still, like a statue, her mind lulled by the patterned dancing of light on the water. It was almost evening when the sea crashed open and a great black island stared back at her. She started.

It was a whale.

She could not tell which species, for so far as she knew all of them were virtually extinct. She saw only his hugeness — he was big as the boat at least — and how he thrust the water from him with such terrible force, how he sprang imperious from the swirl with a movement so charged with life that it seemed to fling aside all the hopelessness of the times.

She loved him, then; she was terrified of him, too; and she feared for him, knowing that the oceans were seething with radioactive poisons. And she remembered the sad haiku an old monk had written at the close of the last century, after the Treaty of San Diego:

*Oh, Oh, the darkness!*

*The fishes have left the sea  
in the midst of spring.*

and because she was bereft of words she

began to hum quietly to herself, and because she was lonely she hoped he could understand her.

But then the whale spoke to her, calling her by name: "Ryoko." It was a liquid murmur that seemed to emanate from the water itself; totally inhuman, rich and elemental. It called out to her as from an unremembered past, and dispelled her terror.

"Ryoko," the water said, and Ryoko was reminded that before the Millennial War there had been scientists who had concluded that the intelligence of whales might be far higher than that of humans... but who's to understand what it thinks, then? she thought. It's an alien, there are no common referents in our environments, probably not even space and time.

"So why are you speaking to me?" she ventured, "and why haven't you communicated with us before?"

He disappeared from sight, and the empty waves whispered: "The first is simple. I am creating sound waves by telekinesis. Our intelligence is not one of hands or tools. To the second question: you do not know what you ask."

He rose again from the depths, shadowy and shapeless in the twilight. Telekinesis, she thought: then why didn't they command the harpoons of the ancient hunters to fall useless into the sea?

"It was irrelevant!" the water thundered.

"On our history tapes I saw my forefathers killing yours by millions, in the days before the Millennial War."

"Child, oh child: you are mayflies that fizzle in the sunlight, cherry blossoms that sparkle when their corpses litter the grass. Your conceptualization of death is so innocent; you do not understand it as I do, and your people's reaction to it is rooted in ignorance and emotional immaturity. No, life is not one of our primary pursuits. A beautiful death is the supreme joy, the supreme achievement of intelligence; life only exists as a necessity for it."

Ryoko's heart leapt with understanding.

"We consecrated ourselves to death many millenia ago, Ryoko. It was a game."

I know about this death, she thought. It is what makes us different from the other races, it's why the whale has come to one of us. My people worship death: the beautiful suicide of young lovers, the noble death of a warrior in the spring. It's the ultimate beauty that pains the heart.

"Child, we must help one another, now."

A breeze came, a sudden chill. There was, almost, no sun. "Help? How?"

"It concerns survival," said the whale. "You humans have not played fairly in the game of life and death."

"We thought we had outgrown our desire for life. We had set our thoughts on eternity, on breaking through the barriers of the material. But when the survival of *all* came into question — well, even we have not the all-embracing wisdom to accept this. We are, it seems, still mortal, still bound by our animality —" he seemed to hesitate. "It is difficult to communicate this to a creature without the concepts."

"Even you will not survive, and most of the animals are already dead."

"No, no," said Ryoko. "My father says some of us will survive." But she thought: Survival is relative.

And the whale — again he seemed to have read her thoughts — said, "Yes, and we shall all survive, if you do as I say."

"You ask us to help you; your *killers*."

"Yes, yes, and you shall know why, when the time comes, later."

The whale paused; in the darkness she heard water churning, and she wrapped her arms around herself to ward off the cold. She sensed the compassion in him, and loved him still more.

"But what must I do?"

"Tell your father that he and his cabinet must come to the harbour at Yokohama in six months' time. We will meet there, to discuss what they are building."

"Building? What could my father be building? And don't you have the power to control matter? If you need something built can't you build it yourselves, even without tools?"

And she knew the answer even before it came.

"We are not builders," said the whale, "but dreamers." And he dove into the dark water and was gone. For a long while she stared after him, shivering a little.

"Miss Ishida?" came a voice, startling her. She whirled round. It was only the captain, telling her she would be ill if she remained. At first she did not answer him, and because he was sorry for her he stood beside her and showed her the stars, giving them fanciful names out of old myths. She looked up politely, not wishing to offend, and pretended to be impressed at his

knowledge, but she knew also that some of the stars were artefacts from the past, still directing their lethal radiation at long-perished targets.

Afterwards they went inside, and she found herself of a surprisingly friendly disposition toward the crew, and they sat talking of little things; but she mentioned the important thing to no one.

From there it was a month's journey to Hawaii, where Ryoko saw enormous charred skyscrapers, black skeletons of hubris bloodstained by the setting sun, and also a fused sheet of glass many kilometers long, that dazzled her eyes and brought the tears to them, and she visited the halls where the young mutants lived and the hospitals where they lay dying. Their deaths were not beautiful. She also saw the great crater inside Halemauau, the one not put there by nature, and the cliffs that had been ripped asunder. She had never understood these things; it was all before she was born. But she began to realize why her father had sent her on this journey, had insisted that it would make her ready for life.

She heard that Hawaii was nothing compared to the devastation on the American continents, and on the way back when they were in Shanghai for a few days, she saw a level desert that stretched in every direction, and then was jostled by beggars whose faces were torn to the bone, and glimpsed a few of those others, those who had grown fat on forbidden flesh. She understood despair for the first time, and clung ever more fiercely to the whale's enigmatic promise of hope.

At night she would sometimes come out on deck to watch for him. He never reappeared to answer the hundred questions she had for him, but occasionally she would hear the high whinings, the reverberant hummings, the throbbing deep tones that were the whale's song, sounds alien and compelling, like the music of the old *Noh* plays. But usually there was nothing; no gulls cried over the waters. She became aware that because of the things she had seen, she would be returning to her father no longer a girl.

Summer, 2022

HER FATHER always used the diminutive with her. "Not a word, Ryochan," he said, "not a word until I've

looked my fill at the *fujisan* . . . no, no, not a word."

He took her hand to steady himself, bent to unbutton his archaic tweed overcoat because of the heat, and allowed her to lead him across the flagstoned plaza, past the grandiose, disused marble fountain into the disheveled shade of a cluster of trees. Ueno was still a comparative oasis in the clutter of Tokyo; somehow, the great Quake of '89 had left it alone. There were low buildings on all sides of the square, seventy or eighty years old, which seemed not to belong to the présent, but to emerge out of a transtemporal haze; moss-veins had fuzzed their outlines, and the torrid sunshine would not lighten their gloom.

Ryoko noticed a big signboard to her left, where patina'd metal gates had been clumsily boarded over. It was written, not in the usual roman letters, but in the elaborate ideographic *kanji* of the twentieth century:

Notice: Ark Project.

*Ueno Zoo has been closed, owing to the recent decision of the Survival Ministry to ship the animals to an environmental reconstruction project in Kenya, American East Africa. Your patience and forbearance is craved.*

Signed:

Akiro Ishida, Minister for Survival.

"A new project, *otosan*?" she asked him, although she did not wish to talk of generalities, really; she was full of the message she must give him, and for a moment the roar of the waves was vivid in her memory, but she sensed the time was not quite ripe. Better to let her father relax, see what he had come to see, first.

They stood in front of the sign. Someone had scrawled, beneath the signature, in roman letters: "I can't read this old writing!"

"Well," Ryoko laughed, "after fifteen years of Back to History, people will still be living out their Americanized fantasies of progress."

"Let's go," said her father, "it's hot, a very hot summer. The museum might be airconditioned by now. . . ."

"Well, perhaps it was an immigrant," she said to herself, her eyes lingering on the sign. "It was a wise plan of your Ministry's, father, to strengthen our survival by reviving our Japaneseness, to conjure up the past when we haven't much of a future."

"Oh, it didn't work, Ryochan," her father mumbled, "and the animals are all dead in Africa."

"Everything is so beautiful now, father. . . do you remember the cherry blossoms on the drive to the park? It must be the impending world-death, heightening everything. . . ."

"The new mutated plague-virus got them when they arrived, we hadn't counted on it reaching Kenya from across the Atlantic so soon. . . ." He saw they were not communicating, and began to walk — quite briskly for his age — across the street to the museum which had been one of the world's wonders in the twentieth century.

But before they went in he turned to her and said diffidently, "I am sorry not to have seen anything of you or talked to you since you came back. I'm glad we can have this time together."

Ryoko suppressed a twinge of impatience, and appraised him silently in return: an old man, a wisp of a man, a small man, an unsteady man, a man of power.

They walked past interminable corridors, past listless guards with stiff hands and dead eyes, and he chattered on about this and that, so that she sensed beneath his well-schooled superficiality some unspoken disquiet.

He needs me, she thought: but he would lose face by saying so to me, a woman, his only child.

*Fujisan* stood by itself in a glass case. It was a brown, blotchy vessel irregularly streaked with a dull white; misshapen, crooked, by any conceivable non-Japanese standards — ugly. It was — and remains — the ultimate teabowl: the supremely perfect imperfection.

When the two of them had gazed for several long moments, they were overwhelmed, close to tears.

And after, in a little coffee-shop called *The San Diego Treaty*, which served a passable synthetic coffee and had its waitresses charmingly attired in pre-war two-ply polyvinyl tunics, they each had a cup of "blue mountain" — whatever the name, it all came from the same laboratory — and Minister Ishida listened to his daughter's story. He heard the whole thing out, without interruption.

"What strikes me now is that the whale was so Japanese, he spoke about death the way a Japanese might. I'm sure he would understand *fujisan*, too, and the tea ceremony, and all the things the old *gaijin* experts found so bafflingly alien about our culture. . . father, you don't believe me."

He sipped his coffee. "Did anyone else see it? Was it not a hallucination, a dream?"

"No! . . . you don't believe me."

"Ryochan —" he lowered his voice. "Our ministry's Back to History proclamations, the cultural revival programs, the renaissance of the old life patterns . . . what do you feel about these things?"

"What does it matter, father? Oh well; these things may amuse the people. What few remain of them. I see there was another suicide wave in my absence." Then she said slowly: "Our culture has never been significantly influenced, even by the surface Americanization of the old days. I don't think what your Ministry is doing is really relevant, *otosan*."

"Your trip has cleared your mind, I think. You're right; our entire program is a cover-up. Despite our support for every form of suicide, especially the traditional forms like *seppuku*; we really are working for another kind of survival. . . . and there is no way, of course, short of totally altering the environment, before the great plague takes us all."

With a flicker of earnestness, he continued: "So we have to find a new environment."

And I know, thought Ryoko, what that environment will be: the land of shadow. Honour would survive identity. So she said "The whale came to the right source, then. He knew things I did not know."

"Yes."

"Still, you don't believe me."

"Your mother came back from Hokkaido a fortnight ago, Ryochan, your mother whom you've hardly seen since I divorced her. She has caught the plague — there isn't a town in the North without one or two cases."

Why did he not concentrate on the subject? "Father, I'm sorry," she said, not without irony. Somehow he seemed so spent, so ineffectual. But the memory of the whale was vivid to her, and she could only feel an annoyance at him for not reacting with the proper urgency. He was avoiding an answer, he did not believe her. Well, she would withhold her sympathy.

"You don't believe me," she said, edgily.

"What choice do I have?" her father said, suddenly emotional. "How could my own child lie to make me lose face?"

Her hand shook. She drained her cup and set it down. Her father was paying the bill — six million yen — with a ten million credit note, and was getting up without

waiting for the change.

At the corner, the chauffeur, an American immigrant, was holding open the door of the black electric Toyota.

They were silent on the drive home. They passed immaculately desolate streets, past the empty department stores and the blind traffic lights, and she began to suspect him of knowing much more than he had cared to say. He had seemed so unsurprised at it all.

There were still three months left, before they would have to face the whale again, together.

THERE IS A little island, thought Minister Ishida, pushed out of the sea by a volcano, twenty, thirty years ago, several hundred kilometers north of Hokkaido. On what happens there, everything depends, everything.

The driver took them up the ill-kept ramp on to the Shuto Overpass. The Minister sat well back as the car rattled across cracked pavement and clumps of lichen. He felt his daughter's presence: pensive, quiet. She had grown very comely; in her classic kimono, she was almost beautiful. He loved her, though he could not bring himself to say so.

She is wise, he thought; in the old days, when they had computers and universities, she might have made a talented poetess, an observer of truths. But the sea has returned her to me a stranger; not soft as before, but strong-willed, a little alien, even. Today, she defied me, challenged my belief in her.

If she were not telling the truth, she could not have changed so much. So I believe her.

I was over fifty years old when she was born. But I could swear that her thoughts and attitudes come from a more distant past than I can remember. She's so quintessentially Japanese, so much so that she doesn't understand what I mean by *survival*.

She thinks that our *survival* is really a euphemism for death, and that my Ministry, like the other two, is essentially a religion.

But why don't I want to die? he thought. . . . like the others? Am I too Westernized to feel the need to take, in honor, the consequences of mankind's evil?

There is an island, though. . . .

His mind wandered; age was beginning to touch him at last. They had come to a

cleared up stretch of the Overpass, and Tokyo's clashing garishness kaleidoscoped about his eyes, even through the smog.

Not *spiritual* survival! he thought. Corporeal, factual, literal survival.

My hopes are on this island alone; this secret island, where they are building the tall spacecraft, this island from which one day they will burst into the sky to rendezvous with an abandoned prototype starship of the Russians that has waited, passengerless, in orbit for forty years to begin a journey of four thousand years, where the arrivals will have no memory of the departers, nor of earth.

*What could the whale want with me?* He knew it must concern his project.

The intelligence of whales came as no surprise to him; but why would they take the trouble to make contact with man? It violated the purity of his image of them — for he had never seen one, nor even a photograph, and they were to him like dragons or phoenixes, creatures of dream and myth — and he was sure that they were meant as creatures apart, ineffable, beyond man, living amidst events and emotions as transcendent as they were incommunicable.

And now, they wanted to do something to his spaceship.

He turned to see his daughter speaking with him, but he heard nothing at all, because the silence tablet he had swallowed earlier was beginning to take effect.

#### Autumn, 2022

THEY ARE, Ryoko thought, like three pathetic old women, parasitically consumed by their glitter-heavy ceremonial robes.

Her father was there, and Kawaguchi the Minister of Comfort, and Takahashi the Minister of Ending; patron of suicides. Their oversized robes flapped against their chests and billowed out behind with the strong wind from the sea. They were abrupt splashes of color in the ashen expanse of sand, sea and sky.

Ryoko watched them carefully, but as was seemly for a woman, she stood some distance off, not intruding on the men.

There were some others, too, on the beach: a dirty old beach scavenger, tethering his rickety boat to a post; two little girls, kicking a rusty can; a mangy cat, sniffing among scatterings of refuse . . . but all the images were lost in the grayness, and all the sounds dispersed in the slow sussuration of

the surf.

Behind her, far behind her, broken warehouses of worn concrete, a century old.

She heard them softly bickering; not indecorously, but with undertones of menace.

"Has he perhaps brought us here for no reason?" Kawaguchi asked.

The Minister of Ending, tall and sacerdotal in sacramental mitre and in purple and gold, looked steadfastly at the sand as he declared: "I have no opinion; I have come as a favour to Ishida." Clearly, this was untrue; he had come to see his colleague lose face.

"But might this not be ridiculous?" came Kawaguchi's feeble, edgy tenor.

Minister Ishida remained aloof. After all, he was the only one with anything to lose.

If the whale doesn't come, thought Ryoko, my father may have to kill himself.

They waited.

Until evening fell again. Then again the water burst asunder in the mid distance, and the blackness loomed out of the water, distorting all perspective. The three Ministers gaped in unison. The old scavenger, gripped by terror, whimpered quietly. Only the two children were unconcerned, and went on kicking the can.

Ryoko felt a surge of tremendous love for him, and she trembled at the grace of him, creature of twilight, leaping from the dark water in a perfect poised arc that mocked gravity for a moment. There was pain, too, with this joy, this beauty made unbearable by its transience. And the bittersweet pungent wavewind swept her face, and she yearned to be like him, to live with his intensity and fierceness, a life-force battling inexorable death.

The same voice came to her, that she had heard from the ship half a year before, but amplified, like thunder and a waterfall. *Come! Come!* it cried.

She heard Kawaguchi's voice: "The whale does not speak, Minister Ishida."

Ishida: "Wait." The first word he had spoken.

"But I hear him!" she said.

*Come! Come!* the voice sang, and it was whale-singing mixed with the music of *Noh* and *Kabuki* and *Bugaku*, eerie; and hypnotic, and she felt herself yielding, yielding beneath its spell, her body moving of its own volition towards the soft water . . .

Kawaguchi said (she heard him only



faintly) "The whale has not spoken, Minister Ishida. I think we may leave."

A shriek: "Your daughter! She'll drown!"

"But I hear him, but I hear him, but I hear him," she screamed desperately, as the others' voices faded into the roar of the waves.

"My daughter!"

"Old man, old man, lend us your boat, quickly!"

"B-b-but—"

"How dare you argue with the Minister for Survival?"

"Hai, hai, irashaimasse," a frightened old voice, remembering his place and remembering the ceremonial forms of address in time. . .

She gave herself into the arms of darkness. The whale's consciousness touched hers, led her into the warmth. A lone gull cried above the thunder. The water parted for her like blankets. There was no cold in the water, only a profound joy, a release from turmoil, a peace, a foretaste of death.

SHE WAS a tiny consciousness enveloped in vastness. She emerged, standing on the waves, buoyed up firmly by an impalpable force. . . as from an immeasurably distanced vantage point, she perceived the wetness of waves and wind which never touched her. The mind in which she had become imbedded was a cavern, an abyss, a cathedral dome, full of compassion and mystery.

Her voice sang out the whale's thoughts.

For some moments, she struggled to regain control of her body; but she gave herself up to the joy of helplessness, like a child on a plummeting rollercoaster.

"... she's walking on the water!" a tremulous old voice. The little rowboat came into view, the three Ministers huddled together with their robes in disarray and the old scavenger pushing the oars. It was a kilometer from the shore.

Don't be afraid, she heard herself say. A voice strangely like her own voice, but more sonorous she realized, for she could be heard above the howlings of the winds.

I am holding up your daughter telekinetically, Minister Ishida. She is unharmed; do not be afraid.

I am sorry to possess her body in this way, but I cannot otherwise communicate with you; to find one such as Ryoko, with the clarity of perception to tune in to and

comprehend even some peripheral aspects of our thoughts, was no easy task.

She saw her father stand up even as the boat rocked wildly to face the creature as a man should; but the others remained in a bundle together, terror-frozen.

"You want to claim our starship? To ask our help in leaving the planet we have made uninhabitable for your children?" Ishida asked.

"Starship?" Kawaguchi stammered through his fear. "What's going on?"

What could I want with your starship? Its dimensions are wrong for me, its environment is wrong. How could a whale travel with you, in a voyage of generations?

The two other ministers were glaring at Ryoko's father with anger and incredulity.

"Ishida, you have lied to us!" whispered Takahashi. Ryoko perceived directly the meanness of the man, the self-aggrandizing pettiness of him. "What is the whale talking about?"

She saw in her father's mind the picture of the starship in the sky, the desperate hope that he clung to, and understood him, his image of survival.

Ishida said to the whale: "We will help you; we owe it to you."

Ryoko was moved towards them, across the turbulent waves. She came like a ghost in a Noh play, her dry dress fluttering a little, her face chalk-white and blank, masklike, serene.

Take the girl. Soon she will seem as if dead. Hospitalize her; remove her ovaries. You will find, in them, fertilized ova; they are my children. They are in psionic stasis, and will not begin to divide until you arrive at the end of your journey. She carries, in her mind, instructions for your scientists, so they will know how to make them grow when they arrive. Is it much to ask?

"No," said Ishida. "But it is a great thing, a strange thing, that we should meet like this and exchange small favors on the verge of the great ending."

"Ishida!" gasped Takahashi. "You are polluting the purity of the Ending, destroying honor! Have you no Japaneseness in you at all?"

Softly, Ishida said: "Perhaps honor is only earthbound. I do not think it will matter to the stars."

Kawaguchi: "I shall die, though, when I have done my duty. I am not a coward; and your scheme will fail."

Bitterly, Ishida turned to Takahashi:

"And when do you plan to die? Are you not Minister of Endings?"

Stiffly: "I remain as long as possible, sacrificing my honor for those who want death, to facilitate their passage into beauty."

Ishida laughed quietly, without rancour.

Help the girl into the boat, she heard herself say. She reached out her arms, of her own accord, and clutched her father's hands — how dry, how papery-alien! something inside her whispered — and was eased on to the boat. They were all cramped together. Hardness of wood, she thought. Wet splinters against my hands.

The other two Ministers were protesting in their own ways. "A hoax," said Kawaguchi, "there's been no spaceship research for 50 years!"

"Man isn't supposed to overreach himself," Takahashi rasped, "You're violating the purity of Ending. Haven't you learned anything at all from our past? You're tampering with truth, trying to find loopholes in it that can't exist..."

Ryoko felt her father's disregard for them. He was looking only at her wonderingly, the way he had gazed at *fujisan* in the museum, with awe.

Her voice said: *You are wondering why I ask you these things. Perhaps you imagine me some great ancient of the waters, able to communicate with you from the supreme wisdom of my old age.*

*You delude yourselves, if so; I am a young whale. I have not yet learned to love death; and my request is not necessarily that of the others.*

Look! The wind subsided. The not-quite night became clear. Misted in distance, great whales clove the air in a frenzied dancing. There were a hundred of them, perhaps more, and they were leaping in unison and falling slowly in intricate symmetries, to crash heavy against the water.

Ryoko felt their surging ecstasy, and how the others were feeling it too. The whales seemed near and far, outside concepts of dimension, as she perceived them from her perspective of immensity.

*It is the death-dance. It has always been said that men will never see it. Nevertheless, Ending draws near, the rules are changed.*

They leapt and then they died, some of them, from sheer exhaustion, and Ryoko touched the edge of the extinguishing of a gigantic consciousness; how they were

released from life, how they were all compassion, like Buddhas. The air rang with strange music. Gagaku music, apprehended neither as motion or stasis... as dead bodies slapped against the sea.

*See them. Hear them. They will never communicate with you. They are in love with death, and their lives have become pure music.*

As though from a great height she could peer into the others' minds, and she saw her father's wary exaltation, Kawaguchi's grudging acceptance, and the untouchable darkness that was the soul of Takahashi, Minister of Ending. There was the mind of the old man, too; small, frail, timid.

The images faded. The death-dance was far out, beyond the horizon, but its reality had reached them through the mind of the whale. And now he had disappeared beneath the water.

Takahashi, seeing him gone, spoke more boldly: "Why do you believe we will do you favors? Is it not human nature to be treacherous?"

Then the voice of the young girl revealed the great secret that had never been spoken since speech began...

*We have among us a myth, which it seems is founded in truth.*

*We have no names — the concept is alien to us — but there was once a great dreamer to whom we gave a name, Aaaaalookekaia, gene-changer. She dreamt a great dream, about planting her own children among the primate-sentients on the dry land. They do not think, she reflected, but they have the potential to be great fashioners of tools. If we could only join forces.*

*She summoned a thousand thousand others from all over the waters — we were millions, then — and they dreamt the great dream with her, dreaming with such power that new zygotes were created. Aaaaalookekaia struggled on to the dry land to give birth, and abandoned her children there, and most of them — the ones which survived — were in the shape of men.*

*Even the dreaming of a thousand thousand whales could not create a true facsimile of man. True, there were the same number of chromosomes, and they even interbred with Men. But some things they could not change.*

*Your perception of beauty. How many times has this been commented on by the*

other races? With you it is instinctive: the twisted tea-bowls, the joy in imperfection is a legacy from us; the wails of the hichiriki and shakuhachi are cries from the depths of your ancestral memories. Your joy in death, too — it is a remembrance of that leap into eternity, as when the whale in his transcendent revelation rushes with joy to meet the harpoon.

This child Ryoko is one who has inherited most strongly the ability to communicate with us. That is why she seems so Japanese to you, when many of your values, though revived, are obsolescent. But all of you are children of the whales.

She collapsed into her father's arms.

ISHIDA HELD his daughter tightly, shielding her from the wind. The old man rowed like a machine, drained by terror. The implications of the whale's revelation came to him gradually: the Japanese people had been guilty of mass patricide. For so heinous a transgression, there was almost no expiation.

Except the one thing that would transmute any guilt into beauty. No, there were no alternatives.

He realized that there was no way of silencing them, and that another national wave of suicides was inevitable.

The shore came nearer. Everything was gray, like an antique motion picture. His daughter's hair trailed lightly across her face, black on white. Her lips were parted, as though about to speak, and she was cold.

Minister Ishida's memories reached back to a time before the Millennial War to a tutor and a schoolroom, to the lines of the immortal Basho:

*mono-ieba  
kuchibiru samushi  
aki no kaze*

"... a thing is spoken. The lips become cold, like the autumn wind."

Winter, 2022/2023

A VAGUE elapsing of time in her awareness; little else. She drifted out of her coma and she was in a cold bed, in an old room with steel-gray walls, and she felt her belly and knew that she had been drained. Her first thought was, *I'm sterile.*

"When can I leave the hospital?"

She saw the nurse: tired, hard-faced, like many workers a caucasian. *An alien!* thought Ryoko. *After all, I am not human.*

Fragments, confused, distorted: in the cavern with the whale's mind. Spray-splashings, wind, the death-dance, the yearning for Ending.

The nurse picked up a swab with her chopsticks and dabbed deftly at Ryoko's arm.

"Sleep now. In a few hours they will come for you, the people from the Ministry."

Water rippling... waves washing her face... whispering...

And sank, effortlessly, into unconsciousness.

Later — she could not be sure of the time of day — she was escorted past innumerable rooms with metal doors, down escalators. A masked orderly or two would shuffle deferentially by, their eyes averted. She became aware that she was known to them all.

Four of them hustled past, wheeling a trolley. She almost recoiled. It was loaded down with corpses, piled every which way. Arms and legs stuck stiffly out, and the faces were tea-green and twisted. They were so grotesque that she could not think of them as having ever been human.

She and her guides pressed against the cold wall to let them pass. They did not smell of death, but sweet, like incense.

"... not suicide."

"No," replied her guide. "Plagué, Miss Ishida."

So it had come to Tokyo now, and would soon be spreading into all of their homes. She wondered whether her father's project would have enough time. She had messages locked inside her mind, what to do when the whale's ova reached their new home. If it was not too late.

She watched the pile of corpses, and wondered if her mother was among them — she must by now be dead, but of course it was impossible to recognize a plague victim...

The whale, the whale.

My forefathers killed them, their — our — very own ancestors. Ignorance was not an excuse.

She shuddered with the shame of it.

*And I'm sterile, she thought, just like the earth.*

REMEMBER YOUR ANCESTORS, blinked the neons that glittered along the Ginza. Shadowing the intersection, the Pavillion of Ending loomed above the

crumbling Matsuzakaya department store.

"Yes, Ryochan, there have been thousands of suicides. Takahashi announced the whale's story all over the country, and when they understood what their forefathers had done, they lost face. Our whole nation, our whole race lost face. There was no self-respect left for a Japanese to feel.

"The most popular death was leaping off a cliff into the sea. Lovers still do it together, fathers and sons, old business associates . . . the immigrants are dumbfounded. They will have the country soon, I think."

**REMEMBER YOUR ANCESTORS  
ONLY HONOR ENDURES**

He's so old, Ryoko thought. She felt a new admiration for him, standing as he did for something as cowardly as survival, against the opinions of all. It made him a hero to her, for the first time.

"Ryochan —"

"Otosan?"

"Will you go on the starship?"

"But who can —"

**THE PAVILION OF ENDING**

They were cut off by the hubbub as they stepped into the reception hall. A commotion of kimonos, stiff hairdos bobbing like buoys in the current, old tailcoats, dazzling lights from antique chandeliers. Little pieces of conversation crystallized out of the confusion:

"... of course, the integral serialism of the pseudo-occidental era was ultimately based on the sonorities of the Balinese gamelan . . ."

"... read Mishima? Greatest prophet of the last century."

"... I've planned my suicide for the cherry blossom season, it will be spectacularly beautiful, to lie dying among the fallen petals. . ."

"... These caucasian servants have no idea of the finer points of etiquette, my dear!"

Turning to her father: "Father — why is Takahashi giving this party?"

"I don't know."

They handed in their shoes and changed into slippers for the upper level where they would relax on floor cushions at the long tables and be served. There was a pungent sake, perhaps not even synthetic; elegant, machine-carved *sashimi* in the shapes of petals and leaves. The porcelain seemed to be genuine *arita* with the character *fuku* in blue on white on each item. Ryoko did not

know there was so much antique porcelain left, after the war.

Her father was withdrawn, and she did not find herself participating much in the conversations. It all turned on Endings and plague deaths.

The long tables seemed to converge against the high far wall where the Minister of Ending sat, above the others, haughty in his gold-brocade regalia and mitre. He talked to nobody, she noticed, and seemed to be walled in by silence. On reflection, she realized that she had not observed him talk to anyone at all that evening.

A faint cry, like a gull's, cut in on her thoughts. Someone in the kitchens, she thought: a plague-death. But just then a civil servant asked her to relate — for the hundredth time since she had come out of the hospital — the story of her encounter with the whale, and they listened to her, those around her, with the stricken awe that she had come to expect from her listeners; and their eyes glittered with envy when she told of the beauty of the whales' death-dance and death-song, and she began herself to hear, in the cacophony of small talk, the rush and whisper of the sea.

But as she talked, she was thinking: Why did her father want her to go on the spaceship? Could he not see that she was coming to a crisis, perhaps to a decision to die?

Just then, Takahashi rose. The voices died down, the clinking of glasses thinned. He began to make a speech.

"Many of you have called me a coward — there was a sensation at this. Clearly something unusual was about to happen. "I freely admit this: I have encouraged Ending; thus far, I have not had the strength to seek it out myself.

"This is the message of the whale: It is the final revelation of Ending. It is now time for me to acknowledge the guilt of my ancestors, my own guilt. The time of Ending is here" — he was quoting his own writings now — "and we must make way, we must purify the world.

"And so I call upon all of you — when you have put your affairs in order, not rashly or unpreparedly — to follow the ancient path. Japan has ceased to be sacred. We are a nation of genocides, of patricides.

"Had you been observant, you might have noted the laser generators surrounding my table. Before the war, such

holotapes as you are now watching were not uncommon, if you can remember that far back. I have already killed myself, in a traditional manner, discreetly and honorably."

He disappeared.

There was an instant babble of discussion; a sudden silence; then, breathtakingly, applause.

SHE WAS SERVING him green tea in his private tea room. He smiled frostily at her, a trifle vacantly; she knew he could not hear her, because he had taken another silence tablet that morning. So she crouched on the *tatami*, in the background, while her father sipped, alone in his private world of utter soundlessness.

After a while she slid open the *shoji*. The Rock Garden was flaked with snow, and the wind was whistling softly. She moved the *hibachi* nearer him, for the warmth.

He motioned to her. She could not help noticing how easily he tired now. If only he were not so addicted to the silence tablets! It was such an easy escape.

"Did you know?" he said, half to himself — for she would not have been heard if she had answered him — "There is a new *Kabuki* play. They are playing it all over the country; it is called *The Romance of the Young Girl and the Whale*.

"It's about a young girl who meets a whale. The spirit of the whale communicates with her, all very mystical, and in the final scene the girl leaps off a cliff and dies because there is no way to resolve the terrible love which she has grown to feel for him... When they played it at Kyoto, there were busloads trundling down to Lake Hamamatsu, and they found bodies everywhere for weeks afterwards."

Ryoko had not left the house for a month; she had heard no news. But the story did not surprise her. She only thought: *Now they expect me to die*.

It was to her a fulfilment, the only possible ending for the story. Her determination strengthened.

The vision was so satisfying. To plunge headlong into the wombwarmth, to drink deeply what she had only tasted before when the waves and the whale's mind had swallowed her up. She closed her eyes, reliving the ecstasy.

"Ryochan," her father said gently, "I don't want you to die. I want you to leave on the spaceship. Beyond the atmosphere,

among the stars, you may be able to begin again, without guilt."

"Oh, *otosan*," she sighed — had he heard her? Yes, he seemed to be reacting a little. There was no knowing when the silence tablets would wear off.

"I have arranged for you to be sent to Aishima next month. They'll train you there, for the journey."

"Father —"

"You were mother to the whale children, after all, for a while you carried them in your body. You gave the instructions for caring for the ova. You have the right to leave."

"Father, I'm more guilty than the others. I brought them the news of their shame. Without an inkling of this, they would not have died."

He seemed to understand her — he had heard very dimly, or else was lip-reading a little.

"How old are you now, daughter?"

"Twenty."

"I dreamt of finding you a husband, grandchildren. I am old enough to remember a time when everyone dreamed those dreams, not dreams of expiation, not nightmares of hideous self-recrimination. You are a wise girl, but still you should obey your father."

She bowed to him, submissively, but denied his statements in her heart.

"I defied all my own ethics for this project, Ryochan. None of the volunteers are Japanese; they're all immigrants, and can't understand the peculiar agony of these decisions. And in the end, I only created this project so that I could enable you to escape the necessity of death."

It was the closest he had ever come to saying that he loved her.

"But I'm empty inside, father. I'd be dead weight, useless for a multi-generation journey."

"I know little about these things. I only found the money, which was difficult because the people were starving and there was no one who would understand. I was very selfish about it, too. Maybe the trip won't last four thousand years, subjectively. There were so many things being discovered before the war, before we came to the Ending.

"And perhaps you won't be sterile, either; in all those years, with all the facilities and the brains that I have put on the ship, they might discover something.

How to clone you, perhaps, from a piece of tissue, so that in the end — the beginning — some part of you — of me — will be there.

"Give up your right to die, Ryochan," he pleaded.

"No, father!" she cried out. She stopped short, realizing with a shock that she had been about to defy her own father. When he had revealed his need for her, his need to be a part of what he had helped to create. . .

She bowed again, but remained unconvinced. She had fallen in love with the image in the play, the virgin girl tumbling into the vastness of the sea. It was an almost sexual thing, an expression of her love for a being of total compassion, a terrible compassion beyond life. She saw herself as the playwright had seen her; an actor in a myth, a symbol. Without the death, perfection was marred.

"Father," she said, to avoid the subject, "recite me some haiku."

Her father did so. They sat beside the *hibachi*, in its puddle of warmth, and the snow in the Rock Garden became an eiderdown of white, and the wind sang sadly. He recited many poems, new and old, and mostly sad ones, about winter; but then he came to the most famous of Basho's poems, the one that all the world used to quote, even the *gaijin*, though usually in bafflement:

*furu ike ya  
kawazu tobikomu*

"An old pool. A frog jumps; I can't think of the last line," her father said.

Trying to keep her voice calm, she supplied the line: "*Mizu no oto*." But her cheeks were moist.

*Mizu no oto — the sound of water!*

There was a roaring in her ears: the sound of wind and of conversations and of electric Toyotas in the empty streets and the pounding of her own blood in her head, all echoes of the endless ocean.

In the morning, in the snow, beside a great rock, he was dead. It was a beautiful death; despite his lack of experience, he had killed himself most artistically, so that he and the rocks and the snow were a tableau of the utmost elegance and restraint.

Spring, 2023

IT WAS A very different voyage.

The boat was similar to the one she had

first sailed in, perhaps the same one; there were the sails, the bare wooden decks, the nights silent and bleak. She would stand beside the railings as she had done before. More at night than in the daytime, though, and she was more alone then ever before, because she had turned her back on the concrete world and stepped forward into the cosmos of the about-to-die. A world rarefied and crystalline, untainted by the sublunary, untouched and still. The people and the boat and the sea and the sky blurred before the beckoning siren of release.

I am in love with death, she told herself. And thought of the death-dance of the hundred whales.

A night came when she felt herself ready. She rose and stood, naked to expose her shame, by the prow where the railings were knee-high. Wisps of fog caressed her nudity.

When the fog cleared the moon lit up her face so that it gleamed with an actor's powdery whiteness. She thought of her remote ancestors, shadowdark and warm under the water.

For a while she half-expected the whale to come, to see her triumphant leap, to share her one moment of supreme beauty. He did not.

She whispered, "I do love you, father," to her own father and to countless fathers and back to the parents of Aaaaalookekala, the greatest dreamer of all.

She steadied herself to jump, a trifle self-consciously, and her eyes were caught by . . . stars glittering on the black water, alien, but the dots in the water were so near that she could have touched them with wet hands. . .

. . . and knew that she had lied to herself.

She had made herself play a role, a role written by a playwright she had never known. She realized she did not want to drown among the stars, but to walk among them. The new longing was an ache, without any joy at all. There was no ecstasy, but only terror and awesome desire. And it had come from finally understanding her father. She had not been in love with death, but only with herself.

And now she would still leap, but into an ocean more unknown, and truly endless.

Land was at the limit of her vision. Glimmering above the black needles that were trees, there were tiny sticks of silver that were the first stage in a journey to the



unimaginable. And seagulls, circling the rocks.

For of course this was the voyage's purpose: to bring her and the other volunteers to the island Aishima, where the rockets awaited them.

And for that one night, before the preparations and the strenuous training were to begin, with the unearthly music of the sea to lull her, she was free to sleep the sleep of the dead.

THERE WAS A night like this for several of those who thought they had succumbed to the enchantment of death. So Ryoko

was not the only Japanese whose remote descendants reached the fourth planet of the star Tau Ceti.

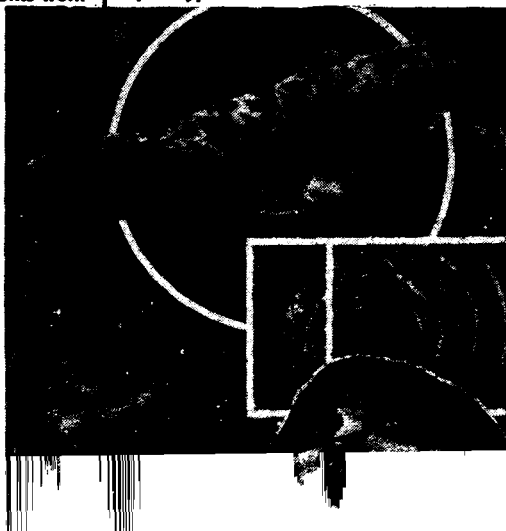
One ought to describe Endings, especially this one, as swift and beautiful, made sublime by their very transience; but the poisoning of the earth was a slow process, and there were still many more years when the whales danced the death-dance on the death-giving oceans, and haunted the minds of dying men with their songs. ●

### Somtow Sucharitkul

*Starship & Haiku*, the novel which grew out of this short story, is out this Fall from Pocket Books. Following soon on its heels will be *Mallworld* from Starblaze (with illustrations by Karl Kofoed) and a collection or two from the same publisher; then the first volume of Somtow's long-awaited Inquester Trilogy from Pocket, perhaps in late 1982. He's also working on a big horror novel, *Vampire Junction*, and *Yaksha*, a Siamese fantasy — "I've got the future mapped out for a couple of years, I can see," he says.

Meanwhile, his symphonic song cycle *Starscapes* was recently premiered at the Second International Festival on the Fantastic in Boca Raton, Florida. It's scored for soprano and all sorts of instruments from

chimes to wineglasses to a glass-shatterer, and Barry N. Malzberg actually played second violin in it! "The most moving musical experience of my life," Barry later commented. Florida Atlantic University has published cassettes of the premier; they can be obtained for \$5.95 (\$8.95 for a deluxe, super-sound recording) postpaid from The Conference on the Fantastic, Humanities Building, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL 33433. Somtow begs to insert this plug since many in the sf community have been curious about his music and it is very hard to get hold of recordings of contemporary serious music. Next year Somtow is doing an even grander work at Boca Raton: it is titled *Star's End — An Anthology of Apocalypses*.





**Illustrated by Alicia Austin**

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# Parke • Up Yours, Godwin Federico

When the bulls begin to live  
beyond the Hour of Truth...

\*With no apologies whatsoever to Federico Garcia Lorca

**A**t four o'clock in the afternoon, exactly four in the afternoon in Chihuahua in the sun-baked clay of Juarez, the *Plaza del Toros*.

Hurry: it is time for the brave festival, the festival of bulls. *Ai, los toros perdidos*, the lost bulls; so many, their courage scarlet on the sand. The *aficion* rents its cushions and eyes the *toril*, the Gate of the Fright, that will expel a ton of death to the clean-raked sand of the ring.

*Ai!* Listen! Now the clock strikes four. In a strutting thrill of brass, the tinny, booming band strikes up "*La Virgen de la Macarena*." With the rigid march of the *matadors* in gold and silk, in the suit of lights, with the *cuadrillas* and mounted *picadores* behind them, now the *corrida* begins.

It has been said by men who know the Hour of Truth, that *corridas* are a market place where men buy courage they can never own. At four o'clock it has been said (by bitter men, thinking men), that the Hour of Truth is known only to the killers on the sand, and that for the briefest moment.

When the cape has made its flight, the *banderillas* placed, the *muleta* stilled and when the killing horns are lowered, tired. When the *matador's montera* has been lifted to the judge, permission for the kill received, the dedication mouthed — *ai*, then it seems there passes, eye to eye, from the killer to the killed, whatever truth or poetry the world can find at four o'clock.

There are those *matadors* who die from time to time, but not a single bull that lives beyond the Hour of Truth — and this, to the embittered thinking men, falls short of the intent of the tragic play. This smacks of considerable disparity, and "*Macarena*" would turn flat but that such men know the world and how it goes.

Consider the breeder of bulls, Don Esteban de Caliente y Escobar, a man of acrid vision far too clear. His son has studied in Madrid, a surgeon of the delicate brain, a balancer of cells upon a knife. A *brujo*-medic, bearer of a torch, thrusting light into the dark places of the brain where intelligence has not gone before.

The bulls have made their family rich and given them the time to think. But then reflection is a bitter path, seeing the world and how it goes. They know the feel of *corrida* and what it means or what it meant. But Esteban was in Madrid in '37 when dreams and blood did not bray out in a skirl of brass at four of a Sunday afternoon, but where bought and sold the usual way the unpoetic world gets on.

Father and son: they have the Castilian look, the thing called *casta*, though their eyes are chilled with knowledge far more northerly; that death is not nor ever was a thing resembling poetry, but an irrelevance except as end to the pulsing single prize of life. Narrow-eyed in seats of honor, both of them are here today to watch their new idea of a bull. (Look at this bull. It moves too quickly for a bull's weight and with precise deliberation that wastes no energy.)

This bull's sire, at his *tiente*, the testing of his will to fight, charged the lance but once and stopped. Don Esteban frowned and the watching *vaqueros* sighed in disappointment. One charge is a pallid showing for a bull calf born to fight. But

even as the lancer turned with a shrug to Don Esteban and his son, the bull trotted casually to place himself between the rider and the entrance to the corral. Then it pawed the ground absently, as if reflecting on the most efficient means of killing horse and rider both at once, and satisfied with its equation, charged again, a tutored death that dodged the lance and killed the horse and, with a certain detached flair, the rider as well.

"Father," said Esteban's surgeon of a son, "this is a bull to breed with."

And that they did. The bull was only fair at love — all clumsy passion, even perfunctory as a human at times — but much more meticulous at death, though for most of his fighting sons with enzymes planted in their brains, intelligence was far too brief before the fever closed their eyes. But now one son of this reflective bull is making his brave festival today where courage in the face of death is bought (to watch) for the ticket price. And the crowd comes roaring to its feet —

"Torro!"

"Torero!"

"Magnifico!"

— all but the Escobars, that is, who sip *cervesa* as they wait. Their bull has taken the iron like milk. His hide is spined with ribboned cruelty and blood rivers the lathered hump. But the *picadores* are scared; the ones he's left alive, that is. This devil-bull gets past the lance as easy as a *gringo* cheats upon the tax of income. Three horses are dead with their digestive tracts rearranged artistically in view. Their riders hadn't even time to pray.

The bull has charged and whirled and hooked — "To the left. See, Father? Always to the left." — following the cape and not the *matador*. It isn't time for the *matador*. The game's not done.

"The greatest of bulls!" cries the *aficion*. "Both ears should the *torero* have, and the tail and hoof as well!"

"Toro . . . torero . . . magnificence . . ."

But the Escobars with sharp, sad eyes know magnificence is yet to come: new poetry for a bartered world at just past four in the afternoon from a fighting bull too quick for a bull to be, with odd-lit eyes that never glare but only watch and measure.

The *torero* lifts his little hat and asks permission for the kill — which, to the waiting Escobars, is optimism of a tragic cast. The killer dedicates the kill to the noble son of Escobar, to the *medico* and his science, and never knows how right he is.

A hush — the Hour of Truth has come. *Al! Pity* the bulls who went before, who always died before they learned that brains can keep a bull alive; that killing bulls requires of men a deal and a sum of skills, but killing a clown in a shiny-suit is easy as rutting and twice the fun.

The bull pauses. He considers the *matador*, that slim objective in the shiny pants. Enzymes planted in his blithely murdering brain retain far more than how to charge. He is not a disparity, no more than the *matador* was to his lumbering ancestors who charged once from the chute and died and never had the time or brains to remember. This bull remembers everything, and if in his inexorable efficiency he strips the drama from the play, so has the world. The bull only states what is. He is a bull for today.

And now the matrix behind his watchful eyes remembers the object of the nimble game. The bull knows it's time; the rag is short. He reflects, fiddles at the sand, computes the distance and the waiting sword — and charges, hooking to the right. Surprise.

The shiny pants go all red and leak their insides on the sand. The terrified *pics*

lure the bull away, and the bull is pleased to comply. This is part of the play, and insofar as a bull can love, he loves the game on the scarlet sand. He lets them lead him just far enough for hurrying peons to lift the *matador* — then turns too fast for a bull to turn and punches the *matador's* ticket for good and one of the peons just for the fun.

No doubt the *matador* dies with a prayer and a sense of drama, however aborted. The peon just knows he's been screwed. *Corrida*, after all, is a tragic poem but not so tragic as the truth known to the Escobars: that in the hollow-hearted world, the festival of courage, the spectacle at four in the afternoon, is a candy fed to children against the aftertaste of a world never won in glory but sold since Judas and Madrid, since Munich, Saigon and Watergate and above all since tomorrow by bloodless men who somehow never lose and have no time for bullfights.

The crowd is hoarse but the Escobars are still. Their bull will have to die of course, but not a virgin like most fighting bulls. This one sired calves of a brilliant breed. Amazing what the younger Escobar can do with a scalpel, an enzyme and a truth. God knows what promoters will promote if future bulls are half this smart. *Matadors* like being alive much the same as buyers and sellers, and there's just no percentage in going against a bull that remembers or knows the whole game coming out of the chute. Like other men they will be, in the Hour of Truth, less inclined to drama than to flight.

The pics are coming to finish the bull for whom this was never a poem. It will be harder to kill his children and theirs will kill the sport, though not before good money's made by betting on the bull at three and four to one (seeing the world and how it goes).

The *picadores* close on the bull, and he wonders which of them to cancel first. He knows he can and knows beside, in bull-fashion, the clear, cold truth of the world as seen by the men who breed him. He waits, computes and paws the ground and loves the sudden red of it all.

And insofar as a brave bull can, he grins.

Olé. ●

## Parke Godwin

Parke Godwin is currently involved in an occult novel collaboration with Marvin Kaye for Berkley/Putnam, titled *A Cold Blue Light*. Another collaboration, *Wintermind*, second volume in the *Masters of Solitude* trilogy, will be excerpted in *Amazing* in the March 1981 issue and published by Doubleday early in 1982.

Godwin writes: "There are many uses for fantasy — entertainment, instruction, allegory.—I prefer it either as pure fun or, more importantly, to underscore reality as I've tried in this story."







# THE AMAZING HALL OF FAME

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*The Hall of Fame allows today's noted writers and our readers to indulge in a nostalgic look at stories from Amazing's golden past.*

## DAVID R. BUNCH'S

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# Training Talk

*From the March, 1964 Fantastic*

### AN INTRODUCTION

By David R. Bunch

Shouldn't a story unload off the fast-clacking-it inbound cars, get its gear together there by the railroad tracks and be ready to walk into the City? By itself? A lonely seeker? Unaccompanied? Uncompanied? Unafraid? Shooting at everything that moves, if it's hate territory, which it usually will be; smiling and gladhanding cozily, if it's LOVE country (but it WON'T be! take my word for that)? YES! IT shouldn't require bodyguards and attendants and caretakers along, either to load its guns, rearrange its bouquets, or wipe its nose tidy-tidy. —And thank you, I'm getting fed up to HERE with authors who keep running up and down, around and around and on and on about their lily stories, why they wrote them, WHY we should just L-O-V-E them, day into night, and WHAT we are supposed to get from these wordy little precious shining jewels, my my, that should win a Nebula and a Hugo and a Pulitzer and a Nobel on top of, mind you! a BIG MOVIE contract. (Why don't these authors just strap themselves to Goldyear brag blimps and shout down scream pamphlets!?) (Myself, I get pen-tied with thought-paralysis when I try a promo-

tion, ANY self-serving gesture. Ho! What the hell, maybe these GREAT stories are writing me, not I them. This pen is NOT for bragging.)

But anyway, and be it so, the lovely editor of this historic magazine has PLEADED with me to some way get together a few words that must somehow serve as an introduction to my *Amazing* Hall-of-Fame honoree story, the little jewel lean-of-words story, the one-of-its-kind story, the-story-of-the-year? story (now now) — "TRAINING TALK"!

So could we just duck our heads a little while now for a silent few moments of soberest thought about how terrible everything is, and how the most TERRIBLE of ALL the terrible everythings is what mostly this story is all about and I mean DEATH — THE END. (And don't let the General or the Teacher or the Preacher or the Priest or the Rabbi or the Apple Waxer or the Airplane Taxier or the Baseball Stitcher or the Medical Practitioner or ANYONE try to sing you around Death's Terrible Fact, not even a Scientist.) Now, it does stand to reason that were we sure of The Promise, I mean lead-pipe-cinch CER-

TAIN, (strictly speaking, "Training Talk" is not only about THE END; It is also about the efficacy of The Beautiful Promise) we could all just stand around in a lounging attitude and joke, laugh and sneer old Death right out from under his terror teeth the while we waited; what time we weren't hohumming our Waiting Time with lily prayers. Self-serving? Of course! (Make MY harp bigger! now. I'LL need more honey and milk! you know. Wash that gold street brighter, God, I'M coming home!) Right? Right on! But—oh well, NOW! "to be or not —" and the whole terrible angst load of it —

SO — I choose to take little potshots at Our Most Precarious Situation all along the way. It is my manner of dealing with the ever-smothery, entirely-innerving, uninterable, awful weight of it, and I think audience participation (the whole world reading, would be fine!) in my potshooting will not hurt any of us, and may enormously aid some of us. The way I figure it, the more little hellos we can send to our Big Waiting Buddy (and he is our big waiting buddy, Big-Terrible-Waiting-Buddy — old BTWB) as we move in toward him — ever closer, always nearer, constantly more cozy-friend — the more we're going to be able to put everything we've got, or ever had, into that last big HELLO right, oh, just right! at The Promise time when the great Zero-Moment comes and we enter Nothing Country, folks, the widest-tall, the biggest all-in-all Done! . . . (Oh, I hope not, and I know YOU — do — too — but —)

And some time, if you can take time from reading lily stories (that should win a Nebula and a Hugo and a Pulitzer and a Nobel and, mind you! a BIG MOVIE contract) come with me to a land I have prepared for you. Stand you down with me in *Moderan*\* for a sobering day-long stay and see how fares it there. A consuming grimness of fixed purpose grabs everyone's best time, and all the flowers bloom metal. In round-the-hours smooth firing the warheads go out, and forever go, in a war that never ends. But best of all, they've beaten Death! up there, stared him down to

his stop — an incredible deadlocked stand-off — with "replacements" — people-parts-on-people-parts that last forever, parts made of special-alloy new-metal steel to make metal-and-people people, oh yes, called "petals." And if there should be a flaw or a people-part get hurt (it IS true, they do fight a lot up there; the warheads are constantly going! people parts do . . .), but it is not to worry; no one has to go into that cold Last Cold. NO! "Just check in at any parts warehouse high on old Redo! Row, identify, certify, present notarized evidence, or on-sffe disclosure and have yourself a 'rehab'." (That's what it says! I'm not kidding you.)

But in "Training Talk" we are still shackled in the ancient flesh-realities, and people DO rot away. Oh yes! Like baloney? Maybe their souls too? Do we KNOW? WELL, just don't worry about it; it doesn't do one bit of good to wor... eeeeeooooo waaaaahhhh eeeeeooo waaaaahhhh EEEEEOOOO WAAAAHHHH OOHOOH OOHOOH OOHOOHOOHOOH OOHOOH OOHOOH OOHOOH. . . . . There! a good screaming time really helps — with pain, with fright, with uncertainty — just a lot of things.

Writing "Training Talk" was another kind of scream, and it helped. And in its year, believe it! it was selected to Judith Merrill's (bless her heart) *Best SF of the Year*. It was also one time redone into Japanese and published for our little friends in the Home Islands to read, marvel at and enjoy. (Maybe on a saki break from those Toyota wham-it-together lines.) (Melican man, he lite glood!) Why the story didn't win a Hugo and a Nebula and a Pulitzer at least, I'll NEVER in the world know — Hey! read my story now. I have to take these leaflets and fly for my Goldyear blimp.

P.S. — (The story is about a black heavy heart on two tiny limbs in an elm tree, too, but things like that are maybe like tangential, paranthetical and entirely only a footnote in the long dark dash to the hearse?)

\*Extraordinary chronicles of the world of the future: *Moderan*, by David R. Bunch, Avon Books, 1971.

**I**t was one of those days when cheer came out of a rubbery sky in great splotches and globs of half-snow and eased down the windowpanes like breakups of little glaciers. I decided it was as good a time as any to talk to them about Geryl.

Little Sister was doing cut-out angels on the floor, her thin mouth a red hyphen of do-or-die centered in the squiggly yellow parenthesis of her long raggedy hair. And Little Brother, muscled like a sweaty boxer, with his shirt off near the fire, was hammering at a train track that got twisted. She was four. He was five.

"Little Sister," I called, "Little Brother. Could you leave off the toys long enough to discuss sense, maybe? You're both growing up, growing up. No doubt about that, no doubt about that." I had turned moody there that winter day, in the soft chair with my pipe lit and my shoes off and my feet stretched tautly toward the electric logs in the mock fireplace that glowed off-fire red. They came and stood before me, trembling slightly in the attention attitude that I insisted on out of respect for me. "Little Brother!" I snapped, "you're not dressed for a conference. Little Sister! your hair's all raggedy." He ran to put his shirt on; she ran to comb her hair.

They were back. "Kids," I said, growing reflective, "do you, either of you, have any idea what really happened to Aunt Geryl?" "She's in heaven!" Little Sister said, and her face glowed with a memory and the beautiful-story-line cut-outs she had been doing. "She's dead," Little Brother said forthrightly, "and either in heaven or hell. It's not my place to say. But probably hell." He'd never liked Aunt Geryl. She was always after him about his toys on the floor, especially the train tracks that seemed to curve everywhere. She and Little Sister had been favorites with each other.

"Where's Mother?"

"Chicago!"

"Los Angeles!"

"Well, you can stop guessing," I said. "It's Kansas City. But who cares? And that wasn't what I called you over about anyway. If it were just Mother you could go on beating your train tracks all afternoon and cut out those silly angels till supper. I wouldn't care. I'd just sit here and let this north-pole stuff slam down on the windowpanes and run down to the ground and form a gray ice blanket from here to the graveyard. Which is what it's doing, in case you hadn't looked. — But I think we all liked Geryl. At any rate, she helped us out. . . at a tragic tragic time. . . when your mother — But enough of that! And anyway I think it only fair that we not go into any nonsense about what's happened and where Geryl's gone. — You kids will probably learn as you grow older that I'm a little different from some people. What I mean is, I believe in calling a thing a thing. That is, I don't believe in dressing it up. Especially about my friends. I don't think they should be lied about. People I don't like, people I don't know — all right, dress it up. Say they went to the moon, or Mars, heaven, hell, or star XYZ. I don't care. Why should I?"

"No reason, Pop," Little Brother said.

"You shouldn't care, Daddy," Little Sister said.

"All right! How hungry are you going to be tomorrow? And which do you like best, chicken or boloney? Tomorrow's Sunday, you know."

"CHICKEN!" they both squealed.

"All right! Go get me the boloney then, one of you, out of the cold box. I don't care which one goes. We'll keep the chicken."

Little Brother beat Little Sister in getting started for the boloney. "All right, Little

Sister, instead of just standing there, you can get me the best two of your angels." She went and after a long time selected her prizes.

When they got back I told them, "All right, we're going to take a little time and do something with this sausage. We're going to carve out a Geryl for each of you, taking our time and making them as nice as we can. Oh, we'll doll them all up! with crepe paper and ribbons and bows and string, and maybe even a little hair from that real-hair doll we've been meaning to send to the hospital! We'll probably need both the butcher's knife and the paring knife to do the job right."

They got the knives, and I plunged into the boloney skin with the butcher's knife and mannered around in there until I had two cylinders of sausage cut out, each about six inches long and an inch or more in diameter. I proceeded to sculpt them to look like Geryl as nearly as I could, long sausage nose, long dishpanhands, face, and little short shaggy-bob hair fixed on. Little Sister and Little Brother watched all the time with interest, exchanging nervous glances with each other now and again and trembling violently once in awhile. My training talks with them were always a little tense, and I could tell they lost weight at such times, but I couldn't help that. A lone parent has the whole load of the training obligation toward his children on his hands.

When the Geryls were ready, as near as I could get them, I said, "All right, you know those two cigar boxes we've been saving, that I said might come in handy for a training talk. Get them. We'll line them with shiny paper." When we had the cigar boxes ready, we put the boloney figures in and the gold angels and sealed the lids down with red sealing wax. "Now we have a boloney stick, carved, and a gold angel in each box," I said. "So before the ground starts to freeze," — the rain-snow had taken a turn toward pellety sleet by now — "You chaps just hustle right out and get this stuff under the soil."

They bundled into their winter heavies, took tiny shovels from sand pails and strode into the sling-shot sleet. I watched from the window and saw Little Brother do his burial quickly by a young plum tree. Little Sister, taking more time, did hers in the open and marked it with a stone white with ice.

Little Brother waited patiently for her to finish.

When they came in stamping and wheezing and all fired up with the cold, I told them simply, from my usual iceberg distance of dignity, "You may each go back to your own kettle tendings and pot watchings now — whatever you were doing before, I mean. In about six months we'll try to get together on this thing again, dig into these burials and finish up this training talk about Aunt Geryl. We'll reach a conclusion about what really happened to her, where she's gone, the efficacy of heaven and hell, the Promise and all that. Or we'll certainly try to."

Little Sister went listlessly back to her angels, and Little Brother seemed old — old, going for his train tracks. . .

When six months had gone by on the boloney sticks and the angels and it was May, green May, we went to open the caskets. "WHERE'S MOTHER?" I yelled to the children suddenly and without warning as we strolled above the green grave sites of our serious grim keen experiments before we started to dig. "New Orleans!" Little Sister cried, and Little Brother guessed, "Boston!" "WHO CARES?" I raved back. "It's neither of those hell places, and I wouldn't have asked you, except I glanced and saw a black heavy heart up there on those two tiny limbs in that elm tree, and I spoke without volition. And never mind that big word volition. Just say that I spoke without meaning to. Just say that the spring sometimes bemuses one until he is unguardful; all brainwashed to giddiness and standing caught with his words down — he knows not —

"LET'S DIG!" We fell to delving then where Little Sister had buried her Geryl and, after about five seconds of spading fast and tossing, my spade all at once fell on a hollow thuddy noise. I sprang forward to claw with my hands, and soon I lifted the box forth. Then I dropped it.

There was a rattling sound! There was a slithery and slathery sound, there was a rasping, like rope being pulled through crushed paper. The box lived! It lived?? Out of one carved boloney stick and a little girl's gold angel something had hatched!! Something had hatched??? WHAT had hatched!!!?

For a moment I stood in awe while sunlight flooded the falsely pleasant world of May and that queer dry sound of slithering continued in the cigar box that was our training-talk casket. Then, recovering my sure knowledge of the world and casting awe to the ground, I cautiously shattered the wax that sealed our casket lid shut and, using the spade for my safety, I pried open the box.

"Kill it, Father, kill it! Don't let it get away!" Little Brother shrieked, and he jigged, and he held his nose from the sausage that was now well over six months of age.

"My cut-out! He's done a nest in my cut-out!" Little Sister cried and jumped, and then she clutched her nose and her chest and went still and white-faced as cathedral statuary.

But I stood brave with heavy hands, as stones, while we looked at each other, measured each other steadily. It had two sharp cold eyes in a head shaped like the forthwith end of a spear. It hoisted a calm slick-stick part of itself upon three circles of chill, and it weaved the spearhead there in the sunny air of May, a wedge that I could not stop regarding. Then noiselessly it left, not even rattling the angel, deftly unslung from its orbs and, feeding the straightening circles over the side of the box, slipped itself to the ground.

"We'll all come back tomorrow!" I yelled. "This is all for today!" I cried. "We'll try to draw some conclusions. Later. We'll dig — we'll spade — we'll bring up Little Brother's casket! We'll assess." And suddenly, my legs going to jelly-mush and water, I sat hurriedly down to the freshly-dug ground. I hand-waved the children from me, told them to go do some kind of games, while I watched a thing that I thought was going deeper into the safety and gloom of the cold and dark-turned soil. Then quite unexpectedly at the edge of an especially large clod I had turned in the early digging it brought up its head, and it looked at me for a cold instant from its camouflage, almost the color of wet soul. Then, breaking for open ground, it glided into the emerald grass of May and completely disappeared from my straining eyes, leaving me to my fears and my fresh confusions. But it was scared! I clung to that thought. It knew it had met a master.

Idly, weakly, I reached for the training-talk casket, my thoughts struck numb with wonderment. I had problems. Yes, real problems now. What miracle? What dark miracle? How into the box, the carefully sealed box? What's to know? And what's ever to know after this? And then my eyes fell upon it. Oh, the saving of all the cold judgements. What joy! At a corner of the box there was a place of warping — the glue had given way, the short nails had been bested — caused, no doubt, by dampness in the soil. A hole gaped there, quite small, but big! big as the world. . .

But my joy was short-lived and my extreme relief cut down to its death almost before its real borning. In my mind that night, thinking and thinking, I knew, yes, KNEW! that such a snake, if it was a snake — such a creature — had never been seen in that part of the country before. I could hardly wait for next day. YES! What strange sign might we not find to help us in the very next training-talk casket. . . ●

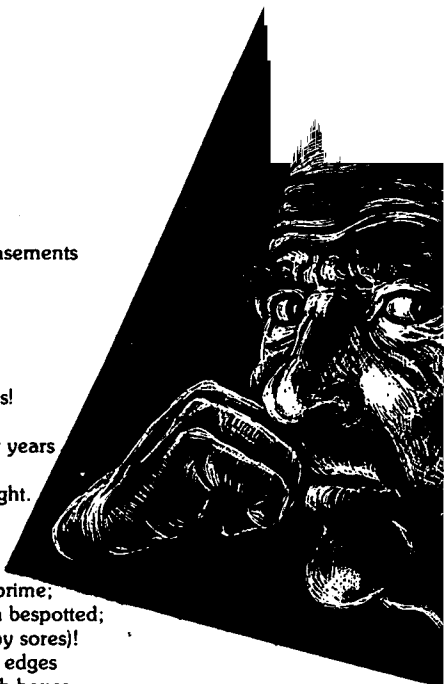
### Let Us Gather . . .

Let us gather down in basements  
these autumn evenings;  
while the rain drips  
while the wind mutters  
let us evaluate;  
there is so little time!  
Let us be apt stock-takers!  
By the small bulb glare  
by the coal piles of other years  
let us not underestimate  
the magnitude of our plight.

The cat is black  
as she crosses us;  
her kits are big, but not prime;  
they are gaunt and seem bespotted;  
(they leak from raw seepy sores)!  
BIG rats are nibbling the edges  
of taste-good slimed trash boxes  
in the hard-to-reach far corners where Dreams  
have struck Old autumn evening  
and must face, somehow, a winter  
colder than any we have yet known  
or yet thought our for ourselves.

Yet, let us be brave,  
let us brace our bones some way to do  
great gallant things amidst more hopelessness  
than we have so far, ever,  
thrown to its back and slaughtered at any one time.  
If our flags are few and not bright  
(and really now! Isn't it preposterous  
to expect them to be crisp in a basement!?)  
if they are only rags from the summers we charged,  
but not quite decisively ever or blade-sharp enough,  
let us go now and under them do the brisk things.  
In the rain rattle of despair, in the wind refrains of gloom,  
well may we discover that we have more flair  
for this last-ditch autumn-evening kind of shoring up  
than we had ever suspected existed,  
and thus brace stairs to race back up to Dreams  
as right and bright as hoping on last hopes  
(fix the Strongholds where the gates fell down,  
slam old Dragons on new steps of Home!)  
and perform the panic miracles of our special plight —  
mouth-to-mouth and open-heart our Dying-in-the-Night.

David R. Bunch





**T**he funny thing is that people kept asking me how it happened. And all I could do was grin like an idiot, and keep my mouth shut, to pretend that it was all my own big secret.

Truth was, I had no idea. I was driving back from my brother's place, Sunday night. Familiar road. I can't recollect that I was thinking of anything in particular. Just wishing for better visibility, perhaps. It was dark and had begun to rain. I switched on the wipers. Was I reminded so vividly, of another occasion, on holiday over three years ago? If some likeness spurred on a moment of pure clarity in my memory, it was too fleeting to grasp and apprehend.

Somewhere between Burpengary and Bald Hills, on the freeway to Brisbane, suddenly it was daylight. When something odd happens, just like that, the mind seems to slide into neutral for awhile. I kept driving. It was still raining. The sky was overcast, but it was daylight, definitely daylight, not a flash, not some kind of artificial illumination. And I began to notice other things. My road had changed. It was a freeway, but not the same freeway. I passed roadsigns that I should not be seeing. I passed roadsigns that I could not believe.

I drove, I am sure, quite a few miles automatically, in a state of shock, trying to come to terms with what my senses were telling me, but totally unable to rationalize any kind of cause and effect for what I was experiencing. Finally I saw an off-ramp, a transport cafe/service station, slowed down, pulled over, and stopped.

It was insane. I looked about me. I was *not* dreaming. I gripped my steering-wheel and stared straight ahead, stunned. I was in England. It was impossible. I opened the door to step out. England did not go away. The transports, the other vehicles on the road, English number plates. And the weather. Distinctly British.

I sank back into the cab of my utility-truck. This was stupid. I wanted to enquire, but to enquire was foolish. I could see where I was. It was too incredible to absorb.

I started my motor. I was, it seemed, already on the road to London. I would drive on. I had the thought that perhaps this silly nonsense would desist, and that in travelling I might regain myself to my proper route to Brisbane.

By the time I reached London the reality of driving conditions had done much to affirm the existence of my present "normality." English driving had deteriorated since my last time there, and now their motoring habits seemed worse than those of Victorians. And I was in trouble. There was only one place I could think to go, and that was to Fleet Street.

I drove into the *Daily Express* basement. I told the man on guard that I had an

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**"It was impossible. I opened the door to step out. England did not go away."**

# **Jack Wodhams**

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# **FREEWAY**

**FREEWAY 49**

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incredible story. Something in my manner must have impressed him because he let me park, and told me which floor to get out of the elevator.

Under such circumstances it is very hard not to burble when an ear is found. This was the very worst part, the effort to keep calm while trying to explain the utterly inexplicable. My air of persuasive nonchalance inevitably cracked in the face of immediate scepticism, but time after time I valiantly recovered the pitch of my voice to sweet reason, desperately aware that I had to convince *somebody*, or flip out entirely.

I was lucky it was Sunday. Still Sunday, the same Sunday. Ten hours earlier than in Queensland. London was quiet, traffic as minimal as ever it got, volume of news items only so-so. I was to a degree humoured, was assigned a young reporter to check me out and get rid of me. It was slim, but a chance, and we went down to my ute, and I gave him everything I had. Australian-made car, Queensland plates and license-sticker. Everything I had was made in Australia, including some Lady Finger bananas and a couple *Monstera Deliciosa*.

Again and again I urged him to check, double check, make any check. I left work in Queensland on Friday night. People in my block of flats saw me drive *this* ute out the gate Saturday morning. My brother, his wife, and others could confirm that I *was* in Queensland just a matter of only, *what?* three-and-a-half hours ago? Was that *all?* It was staggering.

I owe a lot to that young fellow. Somewhere along the line he began to give me the benefit of the doubt, to appreciate, with understandable qualifications, that I had nothing but the car and what I stood up in. No passport, no English money, no home to go to.

Others continued to view me with the greatest dubiety, the legends of Australian con-men were still alive, but now I presented a challenge, and if they thought I was being phony, then let them find out how. And the story was so outlandish, so outrageous, that they then set to with diligent efficiency to prove me a fake in short order. They put me in a room by myself. Every now and then a head would pop around the door to ask a question or two. Good, pertinent questions that it delighted me to answer. Had I watched TV? What programs had I seen? What commercials had they shown? What had been the headline on the Sunday paper? Did I know any of Saturday's racing results at Eagle Farm? Boy, that was a good one. In my wallet I still had a losing ticket on the TAB double.

Before long they brought me in tea and sandwiches. It was all weird. My watch on my wrist said 5.10 which to me meant a.m. But looking out the window of the newspaper building I saw that it was *still* daylight, and the clock that said 7.10 was still recording p.m. Sunday. And, of course, it was summertime in England now. Fantastic.

Somewhere around my breakfast time, they collected me and took me to their canteen where they presented me with a hot dinner and a free choice of liquid refreshment, including booze. I found myself surprisingly hungry, and hardly conscious of how attentive everybody had become. The meal was followed by a stepped-up period of activity wherein I was whisked back to my ute to undergo a bewildering photographic session, all the while answering a constant stream of questions that seemed designed to uncover every aspect of my life from pre-birth to future ambitions.

It was confusing, and a form of jet-lag made me light-headed, but through it all shone a major satisfying relief — I was being believed. It *had* happened. Therefore I was *not* crazy.

I wanted to stay awake, but tiredness beat both me and them at last, and around 10 p.m. their time they found me a cot. They had plenty enough to be

getting on with. They let me pass out.

I had wanted a room at the YWCA, however, there they practised sexual discrimination. I had a good sleep anyway.

I became looked after, suddenly a property. I worried about not turning up for work Monday morning, but they shushed me, and said that they'd take care of everything. I still fretted. I had stuff in the refrigerator at my flat that needed seeing to, the milk, the newspaper, the mail to notify. This vacation had been entirely unplanned, and I'd made no preparations at all.

They discounted my anxieties, assured me that they would take care of everything, then offered me a contract for 10,000 English pounds to preserve their exclusive rights to my story. 10,000 pounds sounded a lot, but the state I was in was so unreal, a fantasy role, that I saw no reason for my astuteness to desert me, and so stuck out for 20,000 pounds. The fight they put up was token, so I insisted on adding, "plus expenses", to cover my air fare home, hotel bills, and incidental meals. They made the concessions. I signed. I was a mug. I could have asked ten times as much. Never mind.

My story did not make front page headlines. Rather they gave me a full page inside spread. The photographs made me look drunk. But Monday was a busy day.

Next stop a television studio. They really *do* powder a bloke like a poof before he goes on camera. They taped a long interview with me, the quizmaster never once giving up his attitude of amiable forbearance during his probing. I wanted to know if I got paid extra for this. It appeared that I hadn't read the finer print on the contract. I threatened to jack up. They agreed to amend the clauses. The taping session resumed after lunch.

So much got packed into the days that they seemed tremendously long. And an appearance on television could distort everything. I had no idea how rapidly such a thing could capture the public imagination, to grossly balloon out of all proportion, to fire such a vast diversity of enthusiasms. Monday, for all its hectic scheduling, was the last quiet day I was to know for some time.

Tuesday the world seemed to explode. At one extreme were those who denounced me as a charlatan, a sensationalist trickster who had plainly duped a press organisation which had behaved with unforgivable naivety in actually believing my utter and total absurdities. At the other extreme were those whose main support for faith rested in what they read, and these hailed a modern miracle, and man's triumph over the material, and the wondrous workings of the Unknown. Between the poles the larger majority voiced its various opinions over the full range of pro and con, but in no case quietly.

Apart from scornful cranks, and people wanting to touch me as some sort of messiah, the bureaucracies of both Australia and England poked in *their* queries, in their official capacity, mostly seeming hurt that I had not troubled to inform them beforehand. I was an illegal immigrant, but they couldn't prove it. Without paperwork they were unmanned.

I was exploited. Tuesday through Thursday my feet scarcely touched the ground. I could hardly go to the bathroom without having a TV camera in attendance. Images blurred. I got headaches. They gave me pills. The pills made me feel fine. My speech patterns began to be reflexive, to make me sound like a well-trained parrot when asked to answer so many of the same repetitive questions.

Friday, for the cameras, they arranged a re-enactment of my arrival in Britain. They took me and my ute back to the motorway, tried to discover from me the exact location where I had first noticed that my wheels were on a strange road. The weather was miserable. We played about for a couple hours, cruising to and

fro, me trying to guess, and my memory lousy.

Finally, getting tired of the whole business, I elected the spot, near enough, what difference did it make? The pace was catching up with me. I'd had more excitement in the last week than I'd had in the entire rest of my life.

They got me into the ute. The whole enterprise had been kept secret, but there were a few sticky-beaks about. TV cameras draw some people like poles draw poodles. It was drizzling rain. I don't know. I wanted rest. I was wishful for sunshine, some peace.

I drove. I do not consciously remember thinking of the South of France, but a picture, one possibly seen in a travel-brochure, bloomed in my mind, to a moment of startling detail.

It was a flash. It was nothing graspable, nothing of sensation to seize upon for analysis. A split second between one heartbeat and the next, a shutter-click with fast film, a capture so swift that it could have been pure imagination. Except that the picture came alive, to electrify me frighteningly.

Like from a hot bed into a cold bath, I gasped. Hanging moments of sheer horror. There was a car coming towards me, on the wrong side of the road. Reflexes took over, and I swerved, and he swerved, and we cleared each other, but the daymare had just begun. Behind him was another car, and a huge truck, bearing down upon me, going the wrong way, and more behind him. I swerved again, slowed, skidded, shot past the bows of a Citroen, had a heart-stopping moment exchanging paint shooshing past a screaming minibus, saw a motorcyclist disappear to my left, got clipped by some orange streak, saw that the advancing hoard was unabating, screwed broadside, and shot off the road to smash through a safety-fence and into the ditch beyond.

The crunching seemed to go on forever. The brakes didn't work too well, possibly because I seemed to be travelling mostly on my side. But it stopped eventually, and I just sagged there, dangling in my seat harness, waiting for the last final blow.

No such blow fell. I dared to check myself out. My hands, my limbs, appeared still sound. I felt my head, my face. No contusions, no red. The wetness on my chin had to be saliva. I couldn't smell petrol. The tank, in this position, was top-side. So my brain started to think once more.

It transpired that I was not in France, apparently on a road that led to the Cote D'Azur. I had thought that most Frenchmen would possess at least a smattering of English, but I was wrong. At first it was just confusing, but ultimately it became most exasperating. One particular gendarme who appeared on the scene kept jumping up and down, demanding to see my 'papiere'. I had no 'papiere' except the *Daily Express*. When I offered him that he was not amused.

Fortunately they seemed to enjoy arguing with each other as much as with anybody, and for a time there was a lot of waving of arms and babble as gendarmes, involved motorists, witnesses, and newcomers eager to add more than their fair two sous vociferously set forth their opinion of the occasion. It served them right for all driving on the wrong side of the road.

My ute was a write-off. The front had dutifully crunched to absorb energy upon its impact with fence and ditch, and the front near-side fender and wheel had become tucked under the chassis. One rear wheel had been torn from its spring, and the diff dripped its blood onto the dirt below. I'd been fond of that car.

The police again tried interviewing me, but I was in no mood. An onlooker who had some English offered his help, but it was too late. From what they learned, they thought they were being made a mockery. Their tempers became shorter. At last I was partly escorted, partly manhandled, into a waiting police

limousine, to be whisked off to the local lock-up for more interrogation. It seemed that I was not going to enjoy much sunshine.

I WAS DEPRESSED. They found an interpreter who could speak passable English, but by this time I was too fed-up to be cooperative. I told them to contact the *Daily Express*. I didn't want to talk about what had happened. I had a contract, I said. Everything I did was exclusive. *They*, the Express people, could, and would, handle the whole affair. I didn't give a damn how intrigued they were.

At last they seemed prepared to act on my advice, and they put me into a holding cell for safekeeping. It was the nicest thing. For the first time in days I was allowed some peace, knew an absence of engagements pending. I welcomed the break. Even though it was still only afternoon, when I stretched out on the bunk, I was asleep within minutes, without even really trying.

My French was limited. 'Oui', 'merci', 'non', and 'merde'. The tucker was merde. I'd always thought the French prided themselves on their cooking.

They didn't wake me till evening. They'd been busy in the meantime. Their mood was different. No representative from "my" newspaper, but a couple of shrewd fellows from some French ministry or another. There was something in their eyes that I did not care for, affable though they appeared. Their English was excellent. They questioned me closely.

I saw no reason to deny any knowledge that had been published by the British press and broadcasting services. I explained the circumstances of my departure from England, and apologised for the inconvenience of my miscalculated arrival in their country. I spoke again of my contract, and asked to be put in touch with the London office, the Paris office, any office of the paper. But on this they hedged, were evasive, and much too bland. They said that it was being attended to, and they smiled the while. Just a little irritated by the sensed obstruction, I complained of the accommodation and the food. And I must say that they took care of that.

I was moved to a windowless, but air-conditioned and most comfortable hotel room-and-bath, and went to bed with a very good supper inside me.

The following day, much rested and mollified by a splendid English breakfast, I was called upon by the amiable pair, who wanted to be reassured that I had spent a good night. They apologised for any misunderstanding. I received the impression that they were backpedaling a bit, trying to regain some ground. The Express had some power. I got the idea that at last the newspaper had become acquainted with the fiasco, fracas, or whatever, and were beginning to lean on some people perhaps. I therefore raised no objections to taking a ride to speak with some experts who had an interest in resolving the situation.

Up to a point I enjoyed the trip. It was when the car turned through a huge pair of gates labelled 'Institute something-or-other de Psychologie' that I began to wonder if I had been misinterpreting the meanings of my hosts.

As it eventuated, apparently so. There were men in white coats waiting for me on the steps of the chateau. When I began to jack up all masks were rapidly abandoned, and I soon found myself being forcibly persuaded to accompany the 'experts' to their interrogation centre in the depths of the chateau.

It was not all that unpleasant. It was just so galling to be denied my rights, to be held incommunicado from those I loved, and from those who owed me money. While they held me captive I could be losing a fortune.

They gave me physical tests, blood pressure, heart, reflexes, took samples of everything for analysis. Then, of course, they had to measure my brainwaves, test my reaction to various stimuli, taping electrodes all over my body, to discover my bodily response to a myriad of circumstances.

It was a hectic day. I had orange juice and a chunk of Danish pastry, but I don't remember having lunch. It could have been served intravenously. Yet, curiously, it was a day that ended when bureaucrats knock off to go home and, to my surprise, I was treated as one of the workers, and was commuted back to my hotel for the night. The Institute, whatever it was, was not equipped to take boarders.

Astonishingly I was able to order myself another marvelous dinner, which imposed a disorienting supposition of normality and reasonableness to the treatment I was receiving.

I spent a thoughtful night. Obviously they were keeping me under wraps, had converted me into a tight-security case. Obviously, too, it would seem that they cherished some notion of discovering the secret of my apparent ability to spirit myself and my car so instantaneously from one place to another. I had no doubts that my Holden ute right now was being meticulously dismembered and microscopically inspected for its every atom of composition and juxtaposition of one component with another.

I wondered myself about the ute. It could so easily have contained a unique blend of an electro-magnetic, even radio-active, matrix, some key ingredient, some uncommon trace element, a rare mesh of static that somehow could create a spasm of fluidity in the time-space field.

This night my sleep was not so complacent.

After another superb breakfast, I was again motored out to the quacks. I found it completely useless threatening them with a diplomatic incident. Surely there must have been a hullabaloo over my disappearance from Britain. Surely they could not have been ignorant of the fact? I'd been on camera at the time, most likely.

I'm not entirely a fool. These Frenchmen were not concerned about British opinion, or Aussie opinion, or anybody's opinion. As a property I had fallen into their laps. It was quite apparent that they considered my strange, freakish manner of being able to displace myself to be worthy of an in-depth study that went far beyond performance for amusement and sensation. If they could gain a clue to how it was done, commandoes, jeeps, tanks, and who knew what-all else could be zoomed through the pipeline.

This day the doctors had more tests for me, some of them quite painful. They kept talking to each other in French, which I came to find extremely aggravating, if not downright rude. They treated me like so much meat, a human guinea-pig.

Again they did not feed me well and, after a so-called lunch of a bit of bread roll and tomatoe, they began sticking needles into me. I was maddened not to know what was going on. My brain seemed to go outside my body and hang from my shoulders. Questions, questions, insane questions in English, questions that I did not know why I answered in the way I did, answers that immediately became converted into gabble.

I lost all track of time. I lost all track of sense. I do not remember being returned to the car to be taken back to the hotel. But I do remember waking up in the back of the Renault, to become at once conscious of where we were going, and to just as instantly decide that I did not want to go there anymore. I'd had enough.

I reverted to thoughts of sunshine. Why I chose California is something that I cannot explain. It was a live image that popped into my head, a scene from a



movie, *Bullit*, maybe, crystal clear, sharply defined, brilliant.

The Renault slid into the tail-end of the morning rush-hour on an expressway that, it seemed, would carry us, if we continued, into the sprawl that was San Francisco.

My guards got very excited. They screeched the car to a halt at the road's edge, and got out, sniffing and questing and popeyed, and altogether rendered quite upset. Then one of them produced a pistol and leaned back into the car and pressed it to my head. He ordered me to take them back.

I laughed at that. To murder me, here, would give them an awful lot of explaining to do. And I laughed again. And, in fact, laughing felt so good, seeing their stupefaction, knowing the complete deprivation of their authority, I let it all go and brayed like a jackass, howling at the excruciating humour of it all, pounding the seat to vent my glee, till my chest ached from its glorious exertion. It was a wonder he never pulled the trigger.

They battled to recover from their dismay, and almost succeeded. They gabbled, concocting their next move, and all piled back into the car, and I got out. Before they could drag me back in, the siren of a highway patrol car caught up with us, closed, and died as the vehicle angled to pull up across our bonnet. I was very relieved. And, I regret to say, also a little spiteful.

In fractured English I claimed to be a Bulgarian defector, and I accused my companions of being KGB agents who were posing as Frenchmen in order to kidnap me and smuggle me out of the country. It was an interesting half-hour. My ex-captors did not become less excited in their denials, robbed as they were of any logical explanation. I'm sure the one who had the gun just longed for another opportunity to clap it to my temple, but having them frisked was one of the first things I'd suggested.

More cop cars were called up, and eventually we all got ourselves carted off. It put a wide beam on my face to be the only one not handcuffed, and to be given the consideration of a police transport of my own, with uniformed officers keen to affirm that my security was now inviolable.

It was not long after 9 a.m. local time. I sighed. I was in for another long thirty-some-odd hour day.

At the station-house, when I met the captain, of course I came clean. I told him who I was, sketched what had happened, and flatly demanded that my contact to a representative of "my" paper be established with all facility.

At first he didn't believe me. But the story *had* reached the boondocks of San Francisco. They'd even heard of Rupert Murdoch. And the pieces fitted. My insistence upon observing my contractual obligations to "my" paper also was readily understood. It involved large sums of money, and Americans are acutely sensitive about such rights, and very conscious of corporate power.

The Yanks have their own way of doing things. Once let them latch onto something newsworthy, it is not in their habit to modify their enthusiasm. My police captain, it appeared, was not averse to receiving some good personal publicity, which his Commissioner and related pols, once convinced of my authenticity, were likewise not loath to share.

The press were hard to hold back, the privileges of the *British Express* difficult to preserve. But even without my cooperation the story was all over the place, and the build-up to whatever revelations I cared to make was well under way.

The people from "my" paper caught up with me at last in the early evening, and I was extremely glad to see them. Some TV people were dangling some very

enticing bait in front of me, including a gorgeous too-casual blonde, backed up by the sweetest long-legged readhead I'd ever seen, who both with overt subtlety promised that, for concessions, they would be glad to assail my purity with irresistible temptations.

The representatives from "my" paper rapidly took command, the hovering delectable females were banished, and I wondered again at what constituted foolishness and what did not, or if the rewards for loyalty would ever be so inviting. My new guardians were all male, introduced as two lawyers, one journalist, one media liaison expert, and one burly ex-senior sergeant of police. The five proved an effective shield and a team competent to organise the priorities of the situation into a proper order to achieve a maximum reimbursement.

The French were roundly denounced, of course, the *Express* trumpeting its indignation and threatening to sue the French government. If the story had not boiled before, it was certainly brought to a boil now. I became a wanted man. I had become another Lindbergh without a plane, another Bannister, another Hilary, another breaker of a barrier. People wanted to see me, hear me talk, to fete me for my weird and inexplicable talent.

Control, again, was taken out of my hands. I became tightly scheduled to appear in one auditorium after another, to guest spot on TV show after TV show, moving always moving, and having my any objection ignored most of the time. If I protested and said I wouldn't move another step unless they paid me more money, they paid me more money. This sort of thing undercut arguments too promptly and had a man packing his bags and catching another plane before he knew what he was doing.

It couldn't go on. The pace was too frenetic. In Detroit, I think it was, some guy got into my hotel room, and had me going down the fire-escape on the point of his gun. It was unreal. He led me to a waiting car. He wanted me to take him to Brazil, the easy way. I was still in my jammies and slippers.

Suddenly cops sprang from everywhere on the parking lot, jumped my would-be abductor and overpowered him. It appeared he was a killer and ranked quite high on some "Most Wanted" lists. What shots were fired missed me, and I received some apologies for being so troubled, and much praise for being so cool. But what pleased me most was to be able to go back to bed. It says something for my state of mind at the time that I credited this episode as being no more than just another incident during days that had become crowded with incident.

I had become an unreal person in an unreal world. I liked the money, but discovered that no amount of it could buy me surcease and privacy. I kept meeting people that I had never seen before and would never see again, shaking hands and exchanging inanities that never became less banal. I never seemed to meet anyone long enough to explore, to create a relationship of any depth whatsoever.

The exception was the team, my protectors, although 'depth' was not the right word. The development of an acute mutual understanding would describe it better. They, we, were all aboard a glorious bandwagon, and with single-minded purpose they rode it for all it was worth. They were good to me, took a lot off my hands, did a lot of my thinking for me, and we played cards, drank and cracked jokes, but for all that we never got close. I was a commercial proposition and, apart from that, there was something funny about me. It was in their eyes when I caught them looking at me once or twice. Speculation. A psychic freak who could take his car and himself halfway around the world just by thinking about it.

No matter how much they treated me as a normal person, the hidden reserve would always be there. It was depressing.

THEY SAID it had taken us two weeks to reach New York. I had lost all track of the days. Hotels, flights, escorted limousines, the repetitions blurred into one another after a while, and for me it became very difficult to remember which was the town that had had a German Band waiting at the hotel, and what hotel it was in which city where I had lost my electric razor.

By New York I had had more than enough of this caper, and was sufficiently on automatic to leave room for my thinking to catch up, to start arguing to restore some sweet reason back into my existence.

Two weeks is a long time for one item to dominate the headlines, and to keep the thing alive it was proposed that New York might be a suitable venue for me to demonstrate my powers once more, to settle the hash of skeptics once and for all, and to confound physicists, parapsychologists, denunciators and unbelievers in general.

Barnum and Bailey would have approved of the ballyhoo. Many of the material decisions became mine. My choice of car — a Rover. I couldn't obtain a Holden ute on short notice, and on a mere whim I decided to give the British car a plug. Whether the plug was entirely free or not I cannot say. I sensed rather than knew that some people were making large fortunes through the promotion of the enterprise. I could not complain about my share — it was formidable enough to make me keenly aware of my obligations.

The Rover was custom-sprayed in large red-and-white checks. It carried the name of a sponsoring soft drink. That advertising right alone, so I was told, had run into six figures, and nearly into seven.

I was getting very tired of the razzle-dazzle. I made more personal appearances, met more celebrities and film stars at so-much-a-plate dinners, and generally absorbed much more limelight that I cared for. I was glad when the day came for me to again attempt to prove my stuff.

I chose the Brooklyn Bridge for no other reason than that I'd heard so many rude things about it. For my benefit, at the requisite time, 6 p.m., the Brooklyn Bridge was cleared of traffic and kept that way. Such had I won faith and become respected. The bridge was nevertheless loaded with pedestrians who occupied every vantage point, and clung to some precariously.

Oddly enough I had no pre-flight nerves. For a man who had no idea of *how* he could do what he seemed able to do, I was remarkably confident.

I had a letter from the Mayor of New York, to deliver to his counterpart at the other end. I had time-clocks, and a pack of scientific measuring devices loaded on the back seat, and a set of cameras fitted to obtain 360° vision all ways round. And one or two other things, including a bag containing \$100,000 in readily negotiable currency. In any case of error, I did not want to be short of funds.

With all the preliminaries dealt with, I was very glad to be able to get into the Rover at last, check it out, and start the motor. This was the magic. Once the wheels started turning a man could scurry the world away from him, and no matter how many were outside, *they* were still, were departing points for his motion, and he was in a cocoon, shut off, unconnected, independent, surrounded by a shell that encapsulated him in a world of his own.

I crossed the Brooklyn Bridge in a test run, trailed hotly by a TV camera unit. I ran through as far as the barricades, turned around, and went back again. It was an interesting bridge. I wondered if it would be long enough. I ran all the way through to the barricades at the other end. I turned around. I had it now. Whatever the indefinable something was, I had the feeling that I was ready.

I tightened the gloves over my fingers, gripped the wheel. I could imagine the

TV crew beginning to believe that they were on a bust. I smiled, and put the car into gear.

The unreality of reality is with us always. I approached the bridge again and began to cross, going slower this time, watching the TV crew in my mirror, amused conjecturing their mixed feelings. I could be a turkey. If I didn't go they would never live it down. I mean, how stupid can you get, following a car forth and back across the Brooklyn Bridge waiting for it to vanish? The absurdity could provide source for great glee and red faces for many a moon.

I laughed aloud. I watched them in my mirror, tickled to think that by now they they were probably *praying* for me to disappear, as I had *seemed* to for the Pommy crew a few weeks back.

The crowd on the bridge was restive. I think some were catcalling now. I drove slowly. The TV truck rode right on my bumper. I could see their faces. Already they were hooked on anti-climax. But I culled the vision behind my eyeballs, and in the smallest fraction of time it seemed to blow out from me, projected like bubblegum, the discrepancies and the ill-defined being trimmed, straightened, skidded in a twinkling to the hard lines of actuality. The shadows changed direction, and the sun that had been fighting to get through smog and smudge cloud burst into high clarity, and the people on the bridge began to cheer, and to leap about, getting very excited. And boats in the harbour caught the trend and began to toot their hooters, and there were flags and bunting, and helicopters whirling overhead.

I looked in the mirror. The TV wagon was still sitting on my bum. They had come with me. For a while they were unaware that they were on a different bridge, that they were now crossing Sydney Harbour.

This awed me. That was a very decisive moment. I had a power that I did not understand, and all at once it frightened me.

I drove the checkered Rover into the Reception Committee at the end of the bridge; delivered the greetings from the Mayor of New York to the Mayor of Sydney.

The junketing seemed endless. I was treated like a hero, although I had done nothing at all courageous. I had been behaving like a child with a new toy. The trip capped my credibility, and nothing too much could be done to honour this Colonial Boy who had a unique capability to wander at will. I was given the freedom of the city, and faced a seemingly endless series of banquets where I might show myself, or be shown off, as a living eighth wonder of the world.

There were too many interested people. The French experiment was not lost on me, nor the attempted criminal hijacking in Detroit. The joke was running out. In my gut I had a feeling that soon the larking about would give way to something much more serious. I was a marked man. I had clever-dicked myself into a prominence that could just as soon become decidedly uncomfortable. I thought of the Russians.

My life wasn't my own any more. I came to the conclusion that fame, after all, was not my bag. I was getting feelers from the military, and other interested parties. I was dined well on cordiality, but my intuition began to talk more urgently into my ear, and I could see no way whereby I might escape the investigative net.

The human urge to *know*. I was a precious gift to the explorers of the psychic. My talent, if its source could be revealed, would be of inestimable value. I was a national asset, praised at the moment, unthinkingly touted at the moment, but about to be recognised at any minute. I could see it coming. I would be protected for my own good. And I would have to obey. Already an awareness of predators could prickle my scalp with apprehension. Another kidnapping was always on

the cards. And a bullet to cheat an exclusive possession of such a rare potential was sure to become a possibility.

I could feel that my time was running out, my number of moments of opportunity dwindling. So at the height of my prominence I *made* an opportunity, created a chance in all innocence while enough carelessness remained to allow faith in such innocence.

I arranged to take the Rover for a drive. I was going to take it to Canberra. I was going to meet the Prime Minister, to actually discuss with him what means might be employed to help reveal the motivating force behind my strange ability.

But I did not arrive in Canberra in time for Saturday breakfast. Rather, with a ready facility that now bothered me with its ease, I returned to a London street. As smartly as I could, I took the distinctive checkered Rover into a lane behind the Russian-Embassy. I abandoned it there. I left the keys in the ignition, one of the doors open.

Here it was sometime before eleven at night. Raincoat and hat, with my bag of money and not much else, I walked quickly from the scene. I had two main worries — being mugged, and being stopped by a cop, who might have wanted to know what I had in the portmanteaux.

I took my moustache off in a public loo, then I made it to a bus-stop. Once an idea takes hold, an initiative is spurred, the vital first step of a plan is taken and implemented, there is no turning back. I had it all in my head. I'd stay the night in one of the modest hotels around Victoria Station. Then early Saturday I'd buy a paper, and go out and buy an old bomb motor. Cheap and clapped out, it would only need to be capable of covering a few miles.

My bus arrived. I got aboard, paid my fare. Nobody took any notice of me. I'd been a very ordinary man for a long time, and the habit of being unremarkable was recovered to me without effort. My nondescript dress, changed appearance, crikey, who would have expected someone so rich and famous as I had become to be taking a bus-ride with the common herd, eh? I had a supreme confidence that I could eat fish-and-chips out of a bag, join queues for services, and pick through Woolworth's for bargains with the best of them, to rejoin the proletariat without being noticed. I was confident, in short, that I would be able to keep a low profile, and disappear.

The bus picked up more passengers, theatre-goers, and refugees from the pubs. They provided a comfortable, cheerful atmosphere. I smiled and adjusted my new glasses. It would be a piece of poop. I'd buy a heap of junk. A hundred quid should cover it. Then take it to a quiet road, and off. Outskirts of Melbourne this time. Then away with the number-plates and license-sticker, and straight into a wrecker's yard. Hardly any questions. Take what price I could get, haggling a bit, though, to get an extra dollar, for the sake of authenticity. Home free. The bliss of returning to normal. Who'd look for me in Melbourne? It wasn't my favourite city.

I sighed, looked out the bus window. Neon lights. Friday night almost equalled Saturday for city custle. I closed my eyes. Home free. I would lie low for a while, a year at least. Let it all cool down. Sort myself out properly. Take it easy. Gentleman of leisure. Salt my cash away in dribbles. Go on a cruise or two, perhaps. Hong Kong. Japan. South Seas. Go back to Fiji again. That would be nice. I could remember the Trade Winds Hotel, wasn't it? Where the yachts tied up alongside the bar. Suva and its duty-free commodities. Could keep a low profile there, beachcombing, doing a bit of skindiving, making out to be a photographer, or a researcher of some sort. It could be a pleasant place to idle away a few months. I could visualize it. . .

I sniffed. I could almost smell the pungent coconutty aroma that came from the copra works. My eyes snapped open even as the bus rocked from one side to the other and came to a screeching halt.

Sweat broke all over me. I knew, but didn't want to look, even as I *did* look. Blazing sunshine. Somewhere around mid-day. Palm trees. Viti Levu. It couldn't be. My heart sank.

The recent revellers were at first most subdued. Those two or three straphanging stooped to peer out the windows. I felt sure that everybody would start looking at me at any moment. I felt an imperative to remain anonymous, blameless, unconnected, to be just another innocent bystander. All at once I could not face any more publicity, the combination of feting and explanation, of being constantly pestered by people.

Desperately I strove to be inconspicuous, to be a passenger as baffled as the rest. I wanted Victoria Station. As unobtrusively as possible I dismounted from the bus as others began to do. There was a lot of talking now, and gaping at the surroundings, and gesticulation towards the gross incongruity that was the London double-decker bus.

It made me feel sick. I gawped with the rest, affecting the manner of one speechlessly stunned. And I worked my wondering way around the bus, to a blind side, at this stage able to separate from the knots without comment, able to withdraw further and further, until I felt able to leave the road altogether, to slip between some trees and angle my way through towards a beach that was handy.

Some native children saw me. Raincoat and duffle bag. *They* were practically naked. I almost wept. I had no chance of leaving a cold trail dressed like this. I hurried on.

I was not a criminal, was I? But I felt at once to have become a fugitive. I wanted to run. And they would pursue me. My disguise would be blown. I had no more moustache to shave off, no other glasses, no other hat. *They would* pursue me. Not immediately, perhaps, but *someone* would remember my presence and, *per se*, my present absence from the bus passenger complement. I should have stayed and bluffed it out. They'd have cracked me in two minutes. The cash in the duffle-bag alone would have taken some accounting.

I shed my raincoat, hit the beach, and walked. My feet crunched sand, and my brain crunched alternatives. What had been a peculiar, diverting, and subsequently profitable manifestation, now ceased to be a blessing and had become a curse. As it was in the beginning, I did not have proper control. I did not know *what* I did, or how the transmission worked. It could be so arbitrary. It was not funny any more. At this rate I could not travel anywhere, in *anything*, without fearing that some idle thought might transmit me kit and caboodle to some other part of the world. Sooner or later I would get locked up. In some parts of the world some persons might enjoy teasing my nerve ends with hot irons in an attempt to learn my secret. And I could not tell them, could not tell *anybody*, because I didn't *know*.

I ran out of beach, climbed rocks, met difficulty, clambered up a slope to rejoin a road. I was being a fool. I could never escape. This road said it. It was an off-shoot, a cul-de-sac. There was a small cluster of huts, a shed that served as a shop of sorts, some Fijians drinking a cola or two outside. They viewed my approach with mild curiosity.

There was a car parked there, a huge old V8 Customline. I asked if I could buy a drink. I chose a ginger ale. I was asked inoffensive questions, and I claimed to be on holiday. I admired the old Customline. I declared myself to be a collector and restorer of old cars. My plan for the wrecker's yard in Melbourne resurfaced. I



enquired if the vehicle was for sale. They asked me what it was worth.

We then entered a game of hum-and-ha, and so-so, and shipping costs, and repairs and panelbeating, etcetera and etcetera, but we eventually settled for me to pay them the small fortune of 400 English pounds for the sedan. They let me drive it away. It ran like a hairy goat, but it would serve.

Crazy. So, all right, where had sanity been for the last month or so? Perhaps I had been primed for this moment. In fact I was certain of it. I'd had enough.

I drove the old Customline, but I had no real idea of where I wanted to go. The Melbourne wrecker's yard trick would not work now. It would be traced, too easily. I rejected Argentina, Israel, Kashmir, South Africa. I turned onto the highway and pressed the pedal, trying to think of *somewhere* I might go, where I might be secure and unfussed, but could think of nothing.

Then into my mind came this vision of a stretch of tarmac that was not tar but creamy white, a wide strip of seemingly endless length, that appeared to possess its own intrinsic radiance. It reminded me in some ways of an airport runway. I suppose, in some respects, that is exactly what it was.

There were odd-shaped buildings on the near horizon, and an uncommon orange glow in the sky. I continued to drive. I tried to concentrate on Melbourne now, revising my intention, deciding to take my chances there after all. But it was too late. I had the feeling that I would never recover the power again.

I slowed and slowed, and finally braked. Outside my windows was a scene that might have been lifted from Star Trek. I didn't know where I was, but I knew where I was, can you make sense of that? I watched the spheres that seemed to pop up from everywhere, to glide to converge upon me from all directions. They'd trained me, let me have my fun, had built up my confidence, and now, whammo! They'd flicked me into the big jump with hardly any effort at all. Fool. I could not even begin to guess at the sophistication of the psychic technology they had employed.

I didn't know who or what they were. My hand was played. There was nothing more I could do now. I'd been suckered properly. I wondered if, after all, torture in a Libyan jail would have been so bad. I had a notion that my duffle-bag full of loot would purchase scant gravy for me here.

But from the way they raced each other to get to me, so spontaneously disorganised, an erratic tumbling eagerness, struck a chord. In an arcing swoop the first sphere arrived, was quite large. It split down the middle like a seed-pod before it had come to rest, bouncing on the legs that snapped out to brace its parking. They were strange creatures that leapt forth. And as they vied to descend upon me, what registered most was their high excitement and exuberant elation.

It was too much. I groaned. Queer as they were, I got the immediate impression that I was going to have to suffer another interminable round of publicity.

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## Jack Wodhams

Jack Wodhams, like most authors, loathes editors. His simple version of an editor is one who should "regard his writers as the necessary manure he has to shovel if he wants to grow the best roses." He adds, "I am willing to accept an editor as an equal, but not as daddy, and my preference is to be published complete as I have writ,

warts and all." Furthermore: "...to be concerned with the mentality of editors requires the study of an entirely separate branch of psychiatry."

Similarly, authors resent literary agents. Now, speaking as both Wodham's agent and one who has 'edited' a vast quantity of his recent material, I feel he is right when he

calls me a "flagrant masochist." Humbly, I tell you, I asked him for a biog, and was told, "You are, as you know, a nuisance, plus you are also a pest. Nag, nag, nag. . . I shall never need a wife to nag me while I have you. Peace, damn you, let me have peace!" So I hope, dear *Amazing* reader, you appreciate what I went through to give you this brief biog:

"This might give the jaded bookstall browser an alternative to universal hyperbole: Wodhams is beginning to feel like the oldest undiscovered prodigy in the business. He has sold numerous stories,

many of which were published in *Analog*. He is featured in the new Omni-like magazine, *Omega*, which was launched in November, and has published two books. He resides in Queensland, Australia, and will send me a letter bomb when I reveal publicly that he works for The Gaping Maw (the post office). Apart from further derogatory remarks my vocabulary may enlist, it is my opinion that Wodhams is arguably Australia's finest sf writer.

— Paul Collins, Australia.

## SONGS MY COMPUTER TAUGHT ME

0000

modern Davy Crockett  
strapped in a rocket  
while lox poured in he wished for gin  
a rocker and time to rock it!

0001

twinkle, twinkle, man-made star  
beaming cryptic bits so far  
scorning earth's gravitic powers  
unabashed by meteor showers  
when your orbit's all unwound  
will Man, your Maker be around?

0010

Sing a Song of Protest  
From Bullets and Rocks let's Fly —  
Between the Bombs called Plastique  
and Morals tres Elastique  
you're almost sure to die!

0011

Moles in their runnels  
and ants in their hills  
lead troglodyte lives  
with minimal frills.  
Man delves in tunnels  
'neath houses and mills  
to lurk in deep hives  
'cause hydrogen grills.  
Fear in Man thrives and  
so scrambles his brains  
that there go our lives  
down nuclear drains. . .

0100

Rash  
non-thinker at my board,  
scan  
the data in your hoard  
of  
megatonic tests.

Note  
the graph of waning chances  
you'll  
survive the hell-tipped lances  
hid in secrecy.

Man  
so fiercely paranoid,  
will you  
a holocaust avoid?  
'hoose amity — not enmity!

0101

The Sun shines.  
Its spectral hues  
though muted by clouds  
of

coalescing atoms,  
still light diurnally  
stark scenes  
with  
utter clarity.

The scour of rains  
on  
glassy beaches  
dries to glazes of glistening  
enamels.  
Patina sheens of metallic salts  
mimic

chlorophyllic greens,  
the  
myriad tints of flowers,  
fall-browned grains.

Tidal pools,  
harsh bassinets of shattered shale  
impregnate with mineral seed,  
spawn  
crystalline moss-like filagrees.  
Angular leaf-like sprays  
and  
sharp bark-like shards encrust  
jagged boles of salt.  
Out of the sterile seas naught  
but counterfeit life.



— Erwin Krieger

# **J. Ray Dettling**

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# **MELVIN'S**

# **PARADOX**

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**Challenging Newton's Laws**

Thomas Stapleton  
1339 N. Spruce St.  
Sunnyvale, CA 94088

Dear Tom,

Good to hear from you after so long. Glad to hear everyone's doing fine and congratulations on your new position. Be sure to say hello to everyone at the rocket factory, especially old M-cubed (meetings and memos Mahoney).

Everything's fine down here — except the pay, of course. What the hell, if it was money I wanted, I would have stayed in industry.

Anyway, regarding your question about Newton's Third Law; yes, there have been questions or seeming paradoxes which have cast doubt upon its universality, but most would agree that these so called paradoxes would be resolved if looked at with enough scrutiny. For example, the Third Law appears to be violated when one considers the Lorentz forces on two non parallel current elements, but if you look at the entire current loops, the forces cancel and the paradox disappears. Yet a question still remains when two isolated beams interact. I'm sure it's just a matter of time before someone works it out. In general, the harder it is to find the paradox, the more difficult it is to resolve it.

Nevertheless, I found your, or rather Melvin Newcomb's idea, extremely fascinating; however, I think you may be a bit presumptuous in your conclusions. Like I said earlier, these things usually have explanations, and usually the explanations are time consuming and very hard to come by. But, as you pointed out in your letter, if these questions are not answered, no progress would ever be made, so I think we should get together and kick it around. Perhaps then I can prove to you (and myself) that your ex-friend, Melvin, has simply conjured up another "unsolvable" paradox. At any rate I won't let my predispositions influence me. As you requested, I didn't mention any of this to anyone yet, but with your permission I would like to invite a few colleagues over as soon as you let me know when you can make it yourself. They're nice guys, but hardnosed skeptics. They don't jump into radical ideas without a good fight. But if you can convince them, you can be sure you've got something.

Anyway, let me know what you decide. Hope to see you soon. Say hello to everyone at the plant and send my best to Alice and the kids.

Best Regards,  
Bob  
Professor Robert P. Beckman  
Department of Physics  
California Institute of Technology

IT WAS EIGHT years since Melvin Newcomb, or at least that was the name we all knew him by, met his untimely death. Actually I never believed for a minute that he was dead, and finding that letter after rummaging through his old papers convinced me that Melvin was still alive — somewhere.

I remember him well. He was shorter than average and looked much younger than his peers. He always wore these funny looking heavy rimmed glasses. I don't ever recall seeing him without them. He was the quiet type and didn't have many friends. In fact, I was probably closer to him than anyone else, and even I didn't really know him very well, not even after sharing the same room with him during our sophomore year at St. Mary's. Melvin was simply not one to discuss his personal business.

When it came to his school work Melvin was mediocre at best. It wasn't that he couldn't get good grades, he just never thought it was important. He had an uncanny ability to solve complex problems without even lifting a pencil. He would just sit at his desk with his head buried in his arms and ten minutes later a week's worth of math assignments were all worked out in Melvin's mind.

If he decided to go to class, he would write it all down and turn it in for a sure perfect score. And if he decided to skip class — well that was okay too. Melvin only did what Melvin wanted to do.

All in all he missed more classes than he attended. Sometimes he wouldn't show up for two or three days, and when he finally did, he offered no explanation. Once, while engaging in small talk, I asked him where he had spent his time off campus. "Had some things to take care of," was all he said then changed the subject. I never asked again.

Melvin never participated in sports, not because he was incapable, he just wasn't interested. In fact, I don't believe he ever attended a sporting event. Likewise, as best as I could tell, he wasn't interested in girls either. Most of those who knew him thought he was some kind of weirdo, but despite his odd behavior, I took a liking to him.

He did have one obsession — the stars. Someday he would find a way to reach them he would always say. At first I would just smile politely thinking that Melvin was only expressing a hopeless fantasy. Later I began to realize that he was serious. Somehow he believed that he would find the answer. "And when I do I will find you and show you," he said.

I never really believed him but I appreciated the thought. I guess he liked me because I was always around to listen when he rambled about the future and the stars. In all honesty, I have to say that much of my own interest in aeronautics stemmed from earlier discussions with Melvin. I only wish he were here now so I could thank him.

The papers said there was an explosion and fire in the Moraga Hills. An old shack was destroyed. When the authorities went out to investigate, they found Melvin's personal belongings scattered about. A body was also found burned beyond recognition under a pile of debris consisting of miscellaneous electrical equipment. It looked as though someone's experiment had gone sour.

I don't know who they found under the rubble, but I was sure it wasn't Melvin.

There were no glasses. That was enough to convince me but not enough to convince the authorities. After checking further, they found Melvin had been leasing the shack for almost two years. And when Melvin was not heard from during the next two weeks, the authorities assumed the body was his.

He didn't have any relatives or close friends, so about a month later they sent me a large cardboard box with the remains of Melvin's personal belongings that survived the fire — mostly assorted papers, a few books, a set of lenses for his telescope, and a spherical hunk of metal with a pair of charred broken wires protruding from its side. I didn't really know what to do with all of it so I shoved it in the back of the closet in our room. When the school year ended I took the cardboard box with me. I would have felt funny just throwing it in the garbage so I kept it.

Two years later I received my degree in Aeronautical Engineering. That summer I met Alice and before the summer ended we started living together. The job market was booming so I decided to forgo any advanced degree and start working in industry.

I hadn't really thought much about Melvin anymore until a month ago when I decided to clear out our garage. I found the same cardboard box. It had a nostalgic ring and I found myself strangely attracted to its contents. I dragged the box into the den and systematically went through it.

Right on top was a folder containing assorted problems from our first semester sophomore physics class. They looked like old homework assignments, completed but ungraded. Probably never turned in I thought to myself, remembering how terrible his attendance had been. In the same folder I found a sheet with the heading "Topics To Be Discussed" crossed out and replaced by "Unanswered Questions." They all involved "what if" situations in electrodynamics that seemed well beyond the scope of sophomore electricity and magnetism. Written on the bottom of the sheet in capital letters was the word **PARADOX!!**

Below that I found two books entitled "Elementary Quantum Electrodynamics" and "Introduction to Space Time and Gravitation." The titles gave me a headache, then I laughed to myself. Just once I would like to find a physics book that had the word "advanced" in the title. Probably only fifty people in the country could read "Elementary Quantum Electrodynamics" but they still call it elementary. At any rate, after wondering what Melvin would be doing with such high powered material, I decided to browse through it. It looked more like hieroglyphics than physics. But the surprising thing was that almost every page had notes in the margin — Melvin's notes. When I read notes like; "good point," "this must be consistent with Osaki's work," "wrong," "same mistake again," "second order terms must be considered," I had to believe that Melvin really understood everything.

I delved further into the pile of papers and to my surprise found an unopened letter addressed to me. When I opened it, I noticed it was dated two days before the fire. I began reading.

Dear Bob,

I am writing you this letter because I will not be returning to St. Mary's and I will be out of touch for awhile, but I did want to explain a few things. As you may have guessed, I've been spending much of my time studying and experimenting on my own. That's why my attendance has been so bad.

We've talked a lot about star travel and of someday finding the right combination of conditions that would bring the stars to within our reach. Well, I think I may

have found the answer, but it will take time, and I work best alone, away from all distractions. I know that may sound strange to you but it's true. I can only think deeply when I am alone. I have to imagine that I am the only person on Earth. But when I am sure I have the answer I will find you and show you, like I promised.

There is little time left. Someone has been watching me work. I don't know who he is or what he wants but during the last two weeks I can feel this presence. I can't think here anymore.

I just wanted to thank you for being the only friend I've ever had. And thank you for understanding how I feel. I don't know why I've had this obsession with the stars. Maybe it's like certain insects are programmed for specific functions. Whatever the reason is it's beyond my control.

I did want to leave you with something. It's something that I stumbled on while I was thinking about star flight. It's not the answer to star flight but it's a first step and a significant improvement over rocket propulsion. It goes something like this:

Sir Isaac Newton said that every action force has an equal but opposite reaction force. The Earth attracts the moon and the moon attracts the Earth, a magnet attracts steel and steel attracts the magnet, a man pulls on a cable and the cable pulls back on the man. What Newton failed to recognize was that action and reaction forces don't necessarily have to happen at the same time. For example if the moon suddenly disappeared the Earth would still be attracted to where the moon was for another  $1\frac{1}{3}$  seconds. That's how long it takes for the moon's gravity signal to reach the Earth (remember a gravity signal travels at the speed of light). So here we have a case with an action force but no reaction force.

Of course, this is only a thought experiment. We can't just make the moon disappear. But it does demonstrate that the action/reaction forces in the Earth/-moon system are delayed by the time it takes for a signal to travel between them. But now suppose we had another kind of system, say two electromagnets one meter apart with their poles facing each other. I'll call one magnet A, the other B. If I switch A on so that its pole facing B has a north polarity, its field will propagate out at the speed of light toward B.

So now we have a magnet B sitting in the north polarized field of A. If we now switch on magnet B to a north polarity it will immediately experience a repulsion force pushing it away from magnet A. This is our *action force*. Note that magnet A does not experience the *reaction force* until a short time later, the time it takes for magnet B's north polarized field to reach A (about three billionths of a second). Now suppose at that time we reverse the polarity of magnet A to a south polarity. Magnet A will be *attracted* toward magnet B. B is repelled by A but A is attracted to B. Now we quickly reverse the polarity of B to south and it again is repelled by the south field of A. Finally switching A back to north, A is again attracted to the south field of B.

This process can go on indefinitely. All it takes is energy but the incredible thing is the two magnets will follow each other. It is a reactionless drive. Oh, I've worked it all out for electromagnets, current loops, particle beams, oscillating electron clouds. Energy is always conserved. Only the law of momentum (Newton's Third Law) is violated. I know your first impression is going to be that the radiation field carries the missing momentum. I've worked this out too. Only part of the momentum is accounted for. Study the attached notes and see for yourself. It really does work.

It shouldn't bother you that Newton's Third Law is violated. After all, Newton's Laws of Relativity, which seemed like good common sense, were found to be inaccurate when velocities became extremely high. Likewise we find that Newton's



Third Law is found to be wrong when we deal with forces that change at extremely high frequencies. These things seem to violate common sense because common sense is based on experience and we don't normally experience these conditions. Besides the secret to star travel will require little, if any, common sense.

I hope you find these notes interesting. I wish I could discuss them with you but I'm sure you will prove them all to yourself in due time.

Your Friend,  
Melvin

For a long time I stood dumbfounded, then I tried to make sense out of his notes. I don't know what was worse, "Elementary Quantum Electrodynamics" or Melvin's attached analysis. It was apparent that his letter was a gross oversimplification.

After three hours of total confusion I placed the letter aside and perused through the rest of Melvin's papers. There seemed to be no particular order to anything; even if there was I'm not sure I could tell the difference. His work was way beyond me. Soon one thing became clear.

Melvin just didn't talk theory. At that time he was actually conducting tests. He had small klystron amplifiers, assorted microwave components, cryogenic equipment, and the usual test apparatus found in an RF lab. And if I'm not misinterpreting something, Melvin claims to have proven his theory with two superconducting rings in close proximity pumped by a high frequency klystron amplifier. I knew enough about microwave technology to conclude that he was trying the oscillating electromagnet approach. From his fragmented records he implied that oscillating particle beams would work better, but he wasn't interested in pursuing his action/reversed reaction approach any further. His theory led him to something much better — something far more subtle.

I had no idea where he got the equipment. Even at surplus prices it must have cost a pretty penny. After thinking about it, I decided I didn't really want to know after all.

Six hours later I decided to put everything back in the box and give myself time to digest everything I had discovered so far. The next morning I was just as confused. Could Melvin really have discovered something as big as he indicated or was he just another naive college student with another unique perpetual motion machine? Did his dreams of star flight overshadow his ability to be objective? Did he grab onto his first insight and rationalize it to an erroneous conclusion? There was no way I could tell. I spent the next few days at the university library, kicked the idea around at work and came up with nothing. Finally I decided to send a letter to my old associate, Bob Peckman, at CIT. I discussed as much of Melvin's theory as I could without sounding like I had lost my marbles.

I WAS GLAD Bob was receptive. I didn't really expect him to proclaim it as the greatest discovery since fire, I only hoped he would be open-minded enough to listen — and he was. I did call him back after receiving his letter just to let him know when I could meet him, and I did tell him to invite his colleagues. I was no longer afraid of making a fool of myself. There was no longer any doubt.

I stuffed all Melvin's notes in the same cardboard box I had saved for so long, then reached out for the object hovering in the center of the room. Near it a warm tingling sensation penetrated my hands. Nevertheless, I delicately guided the weightless metal ball into the box before pulling the plug, then added just one more layer of insulating tape where I had previously attached the extension cord

to the charred broken wires that protruded from the sphere. After adding sufficient padding over it, I sealed the box.

Tomorrow I would show them everything, including the sphere — that is if Melvin doesn't come for me first. ●

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## AFTERWORD TO MELVIN'S PARADOX

Melvin's Paradox was written to present an interesting propulsion idea. I first came up with this concept in 1966 at which time a patent disclosure was prepared. The idea at first appears to be an electrodynamic analog of the famous Dean Drive System (Patent #2,886,976). With all respect to G. Harry Stine (see "The Stars Are Waiting," *Destinies*, Oct.-Dec. 1979), I do not believe that the Dean Drive System works, although I do feel that its inventor, Norman L. Dean may have had an inkling toward the phenomena in Melvin's Paradox.

Why hadn't I tested the idea? Simple. I did not have a half million dollars in spare change, and I wasn't totally convinced it would work. After all, Newton's Law is not one to dismiss lightly. Nevertheless, I did not abandon the idea entirely. I began searching for a mechanical analogy — something that could be tested cheaply. Perhaps acoustics, hydraulics, springs, etc. would exhibit the effect I was looking for if excited in the proper manner.

I never really expected to find anything, simply because it is too easy to believe in

the infallability of Newton's Laws when dealing with everyday mechanics; however, after a cursory analysis of many mechanical systems, I did identify several that were puzzling enough to warrant a closer look. Finally, I decided that the simplest thing to do was to conduct a quick and dirty test on a mechanical system involving a special non-linear springs (variable spring rate). The spring had to be excited at both ends with the proper timing and phasing.

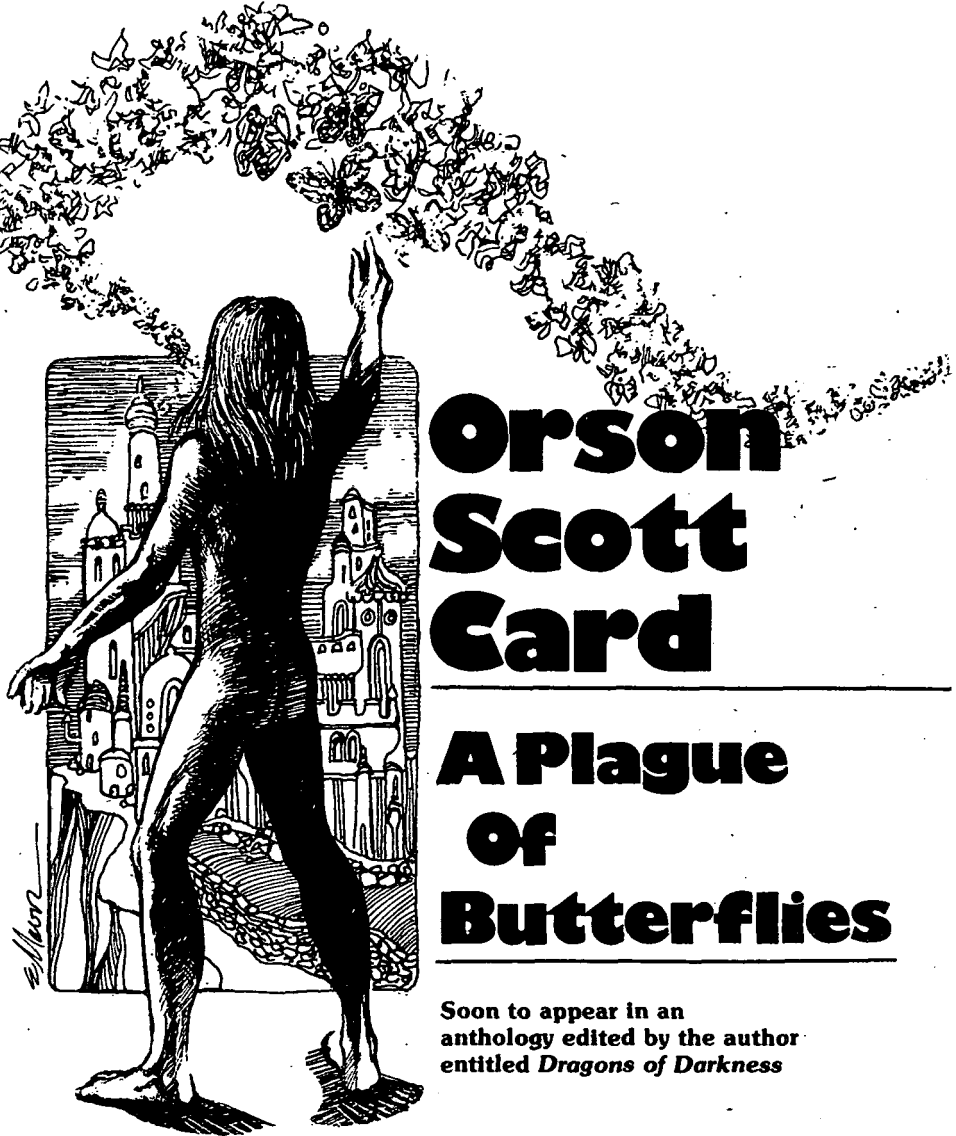
The entire device was suspended on a pendulum to eliminate friction. To my surprise, the device seemed to be working. That is, it always swung in the predicted direction. The deflection was small (as predicted) but clearly measurable. After a dozen or so tests, some of the mechanical hardware became damaged, and to this date it has not been repaired. But tomorrow...

*(Editor's note: Watch for Detting's article in an upcoming issue on the idea presented in Melvin's Paradox.)*

## MICROCOSMOS

Star-gazing  
through  
the wrong end  
of the telescope. . .

— Peter Payack



# Orson Scott Card

## A Plague of Butterflies

Soon to appear in an  
anthology edited by the author  
entitled *Dragons of Darkness*

**T**he butterflies awoke him. Amasa felt them before he saw them, the faint pressure of hundreds of half-dozens of feet, weighting his rough wool sheet so that he dreamed of a shower of warm snow. Then opened his eyes and there they were, in the shaft of sunlight like a hundred stained-glass windows, on the floor like a carpet woven by an inspired lunatic, delicately in the air like leaves falling upward in a wind.

At last, he said silently.

He watched them awhile, then gently lifted his covers. The butterflies arose with the blanket. Carefully he swung his feet to the floor; they eddied away from his footfall, then swarmed back to cover him. He waded through them like the shallow water on the edge of the sea, endlessly charging and then retreating quickly. He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day. You have come

to me at last, he said, and then he shuddered, for this was the change in his life that he had waited for, and now he wasn't sure he wanted it after all.

They swarmed around him all morning as he prepared for his journey. His last journey, he knew, the last of many. He had begun his life in wealth, on the verge of power, in Sennabris, the greatest of the oil-burning cities of the coast. He had grown up watching the vast ships slide into and out of the quays to void their bowels into the sink of the city. When his first journey began, he did not follow the tankers out to sea. Instead, he took what seemed the cleaner way, inland.

He lived in splendor in the hanging city of Besara on the cliffs of Carmel; he worked for a time as a governor in Kafr Katnei on the plain of Esdraelon until the Megiddo War; he built the Ladder of Ekdippa through solid rock, where a thousand men died in the building and it was considered a cheap price.

And in every journey he mislaid something. His taste for luxury stayed in Besara; his love of power was sated and forgotten in Kafr Katnei; his desire to build for the ages was shed like a cloak in Ekdippa; and at last he had found himself here, in a desperately poor dirt farm on the edge of the Desert of Machaerus, with a tractor that had to be bribed to work and harvests barely large enough to pay for food for himself and petrol for the machines. He hadn't even enough to pay for light in the darkness, and sunset ended every day with imperceptibly night. Yet even here, he knew that there was one more journey, for he had not yet lost everything: still when he worked in the fields he would reach down and press his fingers into the soil; still he would bathe his feet in the rush of water from the muddy ditch; still he would sit for hours in the heat of the afternoon and watch the grain standing bright gold and motionless as rock, drinking sun and expelling it as dry, hard grain. This last love, the love of life itself — it, too, would have to leave, Amasa knew, before his life would have completed its course and he would have consent to die.

The butterflies, they called him:

He carefully oiled the tractor and put it into its shed.

He closed the headgate of the ditch and shoveled earth into place behind it, so that in the spring the water would not flow onto his fallow fields and be wasted.

He filled a bottle with water and put it into his scrip, which he slung over his shoulder. This is all I take, he said. And even that felt like more of a burden than he wanted to bear.

The butterflies swarmed around him, and tried to draw him off toward the road into the desert, but he did not go at once. He looked at his fields, stubbled after the harvest. Just beyond them was the tumble of weeds that thrived in the dregs of water that his grain had not used. And beyond the weeds was the Desert of Machaerus, the place where those who love water die. The ground was stone: rocky outcroppings, gravel; even the soil was sand. And yet there were ruins there. Wooden skeletons of buildings that had once housed farmers. Some people thought that this was a sign that the desert was growing, pushing in to take over formerly habitable land, but Amasa knew better. Rather the wooden ruins were the last remnants of the woeful Sebastis, those wandering people who, like the weeds at the end of the field, lived on the dregs of life. Once there had been a slight surplus of water flowing down the canals. The Sebastis heard about it in hours; in days they had come in their ramshackle trucks; in weeks they had built their scrappy buildings and plowed their stony fields, and for that year they had a harvest because the ditches ran a few inches deeper than usual. The next year the ditches were back to normal, and in a few hours one night the houses were stripped, the trucks were loaded, and the Sebastis were gone.

I am a Sebastis, too, Amasa thought. I have taken my life from an unwilling

desert; I give it back to the sand when I am through.

Come, said the butterflies alighting on his face. Come, they said, fanning him and fluttering off toward the Hierusalem road.

Don't get pushy, Amasa answered, feeling stubborn. But all the same he surrendered, and followed them out into the land of the dead.

THE ONLY BREEZE was the wind on his face as he walked, and the heat drew water from him as if from a copious well. He took water from his bottle only a mouthful at a time, but it was going too quickly even at that rate.

Worse, though: his guides were leaving him. Now that he was on the road to Hierusalem, they apparently had other errands to run. He first noticed their numbers diminishing about noon, and by three there were only a few hundred butterflies left. As long as he watched a particular butterfly, it stayed; but when he looked away for a moment, it was gone. At last he set his gaze on one butterfly and did not look away at all, just watched and watched. Soon it was the last one left, and he knew that it, too, wanted to leave. But Amasa would have none of that. If I can come at your bidding, he said silently, you can stay at mine. And so he walked until the sun was ruddy in the west. He did not drink; he did not study his road; and the butterfly stayed. It was a little victory. I rule you with my eyes.

"You might as well stop here, friend."

Startled to hear a human voice on this desolate road, Amasa looked up, knowing in that moment that his last butterfly was lost. He was ready to hate the man who spoke.

"I say, friend, since you're going nowhere anyway, you might as well stop."

It was an old-looking man, black from sunlight and naked. He sat in the lee of a large stone, where the sun's northern tilt would keep him in shadow all day.

"If I wanted conversation," Amasa said, "I would have brought a friend."

"If you think those butterflies are your friends, you're an ass."

Amasa was surprised that the man knew about the butterflies.

"Oh, I know more than you think," said the man. "I lived at Hierusalem, you know. And now I'm the sentinel of the Hierusalem Road."

"No one leaves Hierusalem," said Amasa.

"I did," the old man said. "And now I sit on the road and teach travelers the keys that will let them in. Few of them pay me much attention, but if you don't do as I say, you'll never reach Hierusalem, and your bones will join a very large collection that the sun and wind gradually turn back into sand."

"I'll follow the road where it leads," Amasa said. "I don't need any directions."

"Oh, yes, you'd rather follow the dead guidance of the makers of the road than trust a living man."

Amasa regarded him for a moment. "Tell me, then."

"Give me all your water."

Amasa laughed — a feeble enough sound, coming through splitting lips that he dared not move more than necessary.

"It's the first key to entering Hierusalem." The old man shrugged. "I see that you don't believe me. But it's true. A man with water or food can't get into the city. You see, the city is hidden. If you had miraculous eyes, stranger, you could see the city even now. It's not far off. But the city is forever hidden from a man who is not desperate. The city can only be found by those who are very near to death. Unfortunately, if you once pass the entrance to the city without seeing it because you had water with you, then you can wander on as long as you like, you can run out of water and cry out in a whisper for the city to unveil itself to you, but it will avail you nothing. The entrance, once passed, can never be found again."

You see, you have to know the taste of death in your mouth before Hierusalem will open to you."

"It sounds," Amasa said, "like religion. I've done religion."

"Religion? What is religion in a world with a dragon at its heart?"

Amasa hesitated. A part of him, the rational part, told him to ignore the man and pass on. But the rational part of him had long since become weak. In his definition of man, "featherless biped" held more truth than "rational animal." Besides, his head ached, his feet throbbed, his lips stung. He handed his bottle of water to the old man, and then for good measure gave him his scrip as well.

"Nothing in there you want to keep?" asked the old man, surprised.

"I'll spend the night."

The old man nodded.

They slept in the darkness until the moon rose in the east, bright with its thin promise of a sunrise only a few hours away. It was Amasa who awoke. His stirring roused the old man.

"Already?" he asked. "In such a hurry?"

"Tell me about Hierusalem."

"What do you want, friend? History? Myth? Current events? The price of public transportation?"

"Why is the city hidden?"

"So it can't be found."

"Then why is there a key for some to enter?"

"So it can be found. Must you ask such puerile questions?"

"Who built the city?"

"Men."

"Why did they build it?"

"To keep man alive on this world."

Amasa nodded at the first answer that hinted at significance. "And what enemy is it, then, that Hierusalem means to keep out?"

"Oh, my friend, you don't understand. Hierusalem was built to keep the enemy in. The old Hierusalem, the new Hierusalem, built to contain the dragon at the heart of the world."

A story-telling voice was on the old man now, and Amasa lay back on the sand and listened as the moon rose higher at his left hand.

"Men came here in ships across the void of the night," the old man said.

Amasa sighed.

"Oh, you know all that?"

"Don't be an ass. Tell me about Hierusalem."

"Did your books or your teachers tell you that this world was not unpopulated when our forefathers came?"

"Tell me your story, old man, but tell it plain. No myth, no magic. The truth."

"What a simple faith you have," the old man said. "The truth. Here's the truth, much good may it do you. This world was filled with forest, and in the forest were beings who mated with the trees, and drew their strength from the trees. They became very treelike."

"One would suppose."

"Our forefathers came, and the beings who dwelt among the trees smelt death in the fires of the ships. They did things — things that looked like magic to our ancestors, things that looked like miracles. These beings, these dragons who hid among the leaves of the trees, they had science we know little of. But one science we had that they had never learned, for they had no use for it. We knew how to defoliate a forest."



"So the trees were killed."

"All the forests of the world now have grown up since that time. Some places, where the forest had not been lush, were able to recover, and we live in those lands now. But here, in the Desert of Machaera — this was climax forest, trees so tall and dense that no underbrush could grow at all. When the leaves died, there was nothing to hold the soil, and it was washed onto the plain of Esdraelon. Which is why that plain is so fertile, and why nothing but sand survives here."

"Hierusalem."

"At first Hierusalem was built as an outpost for students to learn about the dragons, pathetic little brown woody creatures who knew death when they saw it, and died of despair by the thousands. Only a few survived among the rocks, where we couldn't reach them. Then Hierusalem became a city of pleasure, far from any other place, where sins could be committed that God could not see."

"I said truth."

"I say listen. One day the few remaining students of the science of the dragons wandered among the rocks, and there found that the dragons were not all dead. One was left, a tough little creature that lived among the grey rocks. But it had changed. It was not woody brown now. It was grey as stone, with stony outcroppings. They brought it back to study it. And in only a few hours it escaped. They never recaptured it. But the murders began, every night a murder. And every murder was of a couple who were coupling, neatly vivisected in the act. Within a year the pleasure seekers were gone, and Hierusalem had changed again."

"To what it is now."

"What little of the science of the dragons they had learned, they used to seal the city as it is now sealed. They devoted it to holiness, to beauty, to faith — and the murders stopped. Yet the dragon was not gone. It was glimpsed now and then, grey on the stone buildings of the city, like a moving gargoyle. So they kept their city closed to keep the dragon from escaping to the rest of the world, where men were not holy and would compel the dragon to kill again."

"So Hierusalem is dedicated to keeping the world safe for sin."

"Safe from retribution. Giving the world time to repent."

"The world is doing little in that direction."

"But some are. And the butterflies are calling the repentant out of the world, and bringing them to me."

Amasa sat in silence as the sun rose behind his back. It had not fully passed the mountains of the east before it started to burn him.

"Here," said the old man, "are the laws of Hierusalem:

"Once you see the city, don't step back or you will lose it.

"Don't look down into holes that glow red in the streets, or your eyes will fall out and your skin will slide off you as you walk along, and your bones will crumble into dust before you fully die.

"The man who breaks a butterfly will live forever.

"Do not stare at a small grey shadow that moves along the granite walls of the palace of the King and Queen, or he will learn the way to your bed.

"The Road to Dalmanutha leads to the sign you seek. Never find it."

Then the old man smiled.

"Why are you smiling?" asked Amasa.

"Because you're such a holy man, Saint Amasa, and Hierusalem is waiting for you to come."

"What's your name, old man?"

The old man cocked his head. "Contemplation."

"That's not a name."

He smiled again. "I'm not a man."

For a moment Amasa believed him, and reached out to see if he was real. But his finger met the old man's flesh, and it did not crumble.

"You have so much faith," said the old man again. "You cast away your scrip because you valued nothing that it contained. What do you value?"

In answer, Amasa removed all his clothing and cast it at the old man's feet.

HE REMEMBERS that once he had another name, but he cannot remember what it was. His name now is Gray, and he lives among the stones, which are also grey. Sometimes he forgets where stone leaves off and he begins. Sometimes, when he has been motionless for hours, he has to search for his toes that spread in a fan, each holding to stone so firmly that when at last he moves them, he is surprised at where they were. Gray is motionless all day, and motionless all night. But in the hours before and after the sun, then he moves, skittering sure and rapid as a spider among the hewn stones of the palace walls, stopping only to drink in the fly-strewn standing water that remains from the last storm.

These days, however, he must move more slowly, more clumsily than he used to, for his stamen has at last grown huge, and it drags painfully along the vertical stones, and now and then he steps on it. It has been this way for weeks. Worse every day, and Gray feels it as a constant pain that he must ease, must ease, must ease; but in his small mind he does not know what easment there might be. So far as he knows, there are no others of his kind; in all his life he has met no other climber of walls, no other hanger from stone ceilings. He remembers that once he sought out couplers in the night, but he cannot remember what he did with them. Now he again finds himself drawn to windows, searching for easement, though not sure at all, holding in his mind no image of what he hopes to see in the dark rooms within the palace. It is dusk, and Gray is hunting, and is not sure whether he will find mate or prey.

I HAVE PASSED the gate of Hierusalem, thought Amasa, and I was not near enough to death. Or worse, sometimes he thought, there is no Hierusalem, and I have come this way in vain. Yet this last fear was not a fear at all, for he did not think of it with despair. He thought of it with hope, and looked for death as the welcome end of his journey, looked for death which comes with its tongue thick in its mouth, death which waits in caves during the cool of the day and hunts for prey in the last and first light, death which is made of dust. Amasa watched for death to come in a wind that would carry him away, in a stone that would catch his foot in midstep and crumble him into a pile of bone on the road.

And then in a single footfall Amasa saw it all. The sun was framed, not by a haze of white light, but by thick and heavy clouds. The orchards were also heavy, and dripped with recent rain. Bees hummed around his head. And now he could see the city rising, green and grey and monumental just beyond the trees; all around him was the sound of running water. Not the tentative water that struggled to stay alive in the thirsty dirt of the irrigation ditch, but the lusty sound of water that is superfluous, water that can be tossed in the air as fountains and no one thinks to gather up the drops.

For a moment he was so surprised that he thought he must step backward, just one step, and see if it wouldn't all disappear, for Amasa did not come upon this gradually, and he doubted that it was real. But he remembered the first warning of the old man, and he didn't take that backward step. Hierusalem was a miracle, and in this place he would test no miracles.

The ground was resilient under his feet, mossy where the path ran over stone,

grassy where the stones made way for earth. He drank at an untended stream that ran pure and overhung with flowers. And then he passed through a small gate in a terraced wall, climbed stairs, found another gate, and another, each more graceful than the last. The first gate was rusty and hard to open; the second was overgrown with climbing roses. But each gate was better tended than the last, and he kept expecting to find someone working a garden or picnicking, for surely someone must be passing often through the better-kept gates. Finally he reached to open a gate and it opened before he could touch it.

It was a man in the dirty brown robe of a pilgrim. He seemed startled to see Amasa. He immediately enfolded his arms around something and turned away. Amasa tried to see — yes, it was a baby. But the infant's hands dripped with fresh blood, it was obviously blood, and Amasa looked back at the pilgrim to see if this was a murderer who had opened the gate for him.

"It's not what you think," the palmer said quickly. "I found the babe, and he has no one to take care of him."

"But the blood."

"He was the child of pleasure-seekers, and the prophecy was fulfilled, for he was washing his hands in the blood of his father's belly." Then the pilgrim got a hopeful look. "There is an enemy who must be fought. You wouldn't—"

A passing butterfly caught the pilgrim's eye. The fluttering wings circled Amasa's head only once, but that was sign enough.

"It is you," the pilgrim said.

"Do I know you?"

"To think that it will be in my time."

"What will be?"

"The slaying of the dragon." The pilgrim ducked his head and, freeing one arm by perching the child precariously on the other, he held the gate open for Amasa to enter. "God has surely called you."

Amasa stepped inside, puzzled at what the pilgrim thought he was, and what his coming portended. Behind him he could hear the pilgrim mutter, "It is time. It is time."

It was the last gate. He was in the city, passing between the walled gardens of monasteries and nunneries, down streets lined with shrines and shops, temples and houses, gardens and dunghills. It was green to the point of blindness, alive and holy and smelly and choked with business wherever it wasn't thick with meditation. What am I here for? Amasa wondered. Why did the butterflies call?

He did not look down into the red-glowing holes in the middles of streets. And when he passed the grey labyrinth of the palace, he did not look up to try to find a shadow sliding by. He would live by the laws of the place, and perhaps his journey would end here.

THE QUEEN of Hierusalem was lonely. For a month she had been lost in the palace. She had strayed into a never-used portion of the labyrinth, where no one had lived for generations, and now, search as she might, she could find only rooms that were deeper and deeper in dust.

The servants, of course, knew exactly where she was, and some of them grumbled at having to come into a place of such filth, full of such unstylish old furniture, in order to care for her. It did not occur to *them* that she was lost — they only thought she was exploring. It would never do for her to admit her perplexity to them. It was the Queen's business to know what she was doing. She couldn't very well ask a servant, "Oh, by the way, while you're fetching my supper, would you mind mentioning to me where I *am*?" So she remained lost, and the

perpetual dust irritated all her allergies.

The Queen was immensely fat, too, which complicated things. Walking was a great labor to her, so that once she found a room with a bed that looked sturdy enough to hold her for a few nights, she stayed until the bed threatened to give way. Her progress through the unused rooms, then, was not in a great expedition, but rather in fits and starts. On one morning she would arise miserable from the bed's increasing incapacity to hold her, eat her vast breakfast while the servants looked on to catch the dribbles, and then, instead of calling for singers or someone to read, she would order four servants to stand her up, point her in the direction she chose, and taxi her to a good, running start.

"That door," she cried again and again, and the servants would propel her in that direction, while her legs trotted underneath her, trying to keep up with her body. And in the new room she could not stop to contemplate: she must take it all in on the run, with just a few mad glances, then decide whether to try to stay or go on. "On," she usually cried, and the servants took her through the gradual curves and maneuvers necessary to reach whatever door was most capacious.

On the day that Amasa arrived in Hierusalem, the Queen found a room with a vast bed, once used by some ancient rake of a prince to hold a dozen paramours at once, and the Queen cried out, "This is it, this is the right place, stop, we'll stay!" and the servants sighed in relief and began to sweep, to clean, to make the place liveable.

Her steward unctuously asked her, "What do you want to wear to the King's Invocation?"

"I will not go," she said. How could she? She did not know how to get to the hall where the ritual would be held. "I choose to be absent this once. There'll be another one in seven years." The steward bowed and left on his errand, while the Queen envied him his sense of direction and miserably wished that she could go home to her own rooms. She hadn't been to a party in a month, and now that she was so far from the kitchens the food was almost cold by the time she was served the private dinners she had to be content with. Damn her husband's ancestors for building all these rooms anyway.

AMASA SLEPT by a dunghill because it was warmer there, naked as he was; and in the morning, without leaving the dunghill, he found work. He was wakened by the servants of a great Bishop, stablemen who had the week's manure to leave for the farmers to collect. They said nothing to him, except to look with disapproval at his nakedness, but set to work, emptying small wheelbarrows, then raking up the dung to make a neater pile. Amasa saw how fastidiously they avoided touching the dung; he had no such scruples. He took an idle rake, stepped into the midst of the manure, and raked the hill higher and faster than the delicate stablemen could manage on their own. He worked with such a will that the Stablemaster took him aside at the end of the task.

"Want work?"

"Why not?" Amasa answered.

The Stablemaster glanced pointedly at Amasa's unclothed body. "Are you fasting?"

Amasa shook his head. "I just left my clothing on the road."

"You should be more careful with your belongings. I can give you livery, but it comes out of your wages for a year."

Amasa shrugged. He had no use for wages.

The work was mindless and hard, but Amasa delighted in it. The variety was endless. Because he didn't mind it, they kept him shoveling more manure than his fair share, but the shoveling of manure was like a drone, a background for

bright rhinestones of childish delight: morning prayers, when the Bishop in his silver gown intoned the powerful words while the servants stood in the courtyard clumsily aping his signs; running through the streets behind the Bishop's carriage shouting "Huzzah, huzzah!" while the Bishop scattered coins for the pedestrians; standing watch over the carriage, which meant drinking and hearing stories and songs with the other servants; or going inside to do attendance on the Bishop at the great occasions of this or that church or embassy or noble house, delighting in the elaborate costumes that so cleverly managed to adhere to the sumptuary laws while being as ostentatious and lewd as possible. It was grand, God approved of it all, and even discreet prurience and titillation were a face of the coin of worship and ecstasy.

But years at the desert's edge had taught Amasa to value things that the other servants never noticed. He did not have to measure his drinking water. The servants splashed each other in the bathhouse. He could piss on the ground and no little animals came to sniff at the puddle, no dying insects lit on it to drink.

They called Hierusalem a city of stone and fire, but Amasa knew it was a city of life and water, worth more than all the gold that was forever changing hands.

The other stablemen accepted Amasa well enough, but a distance always remained. He had come naked, from the outside; he had no fear of uncleanness before the Lord; and something else: Amasa had known the taste of death in his mouth and it had not been unwelcome. Now he accepted as they came the pleasures of a stableman's life. But he did not need them, and knew he could not hide that from his fellows.

One day the Prior told the Steward, and the Steward the Stablemaster, and the Stablemaster told Amasa and the other stablemen to wash carefully three times, each time with soap. The old-timers knew what it meant, and told them all: It was the King's Invocation that came but once in seven years, and the Bishop would bring them all to stand in attendance, clean and fine in their livery, while he took part in the solemn ordinances. They would have perfume in their hair. And they would see the King and Queen.

"Is she beautiful?" Amasa asked, surprised at the awe in the voices of these irreverent men when they spoke of her.

And they laughed and compared the Queen to a mountain, to a planet, to a moon.

But then a butterfly alighted on the head of an old woman, and suddenly all laughter stopped. "The butterfly," they all whispered. The woman's eyes went blank, and she began to speak:

"The Queen is beautiful, Saint Amasa, to those who have the eyes to see it."

The servants whispered: See, the butterfly speaks to the new one, who came naked.

"Of all the holy men to come out of the world, Saint Amasa, of all the wise and weary souls, you are wisest, you are weariest, you are most holy."

Amasa trembled at the voice of the butterfly. In memory he suddenly loomed over the crevice of Ekdippa, and it was leaping up to take him.

"We brought you here to save her, save her, save her," said the old woman, looking straight into Amasa's eyes.

Amasa shook his head. "I'm through with quests," he said.

And foam came to the old woman's mouth, wax oozed from her ears, her nose ran with mucus, her eyes overflowed with sparkling tears.

Amasa reached out to the butterfly perched on her head, the fragile butterfly that was wracking the old woman so, and he took it in his hand. Took it in his right hand, folded the wings closed with his left, and then brokel the butterfly as crisply

as a stick. The sound of it rang metallically in the air. There was no ichor from the butterfly, for it was made of something tough as metal, brittle as plastic, and electricity danced between the halves of the butterfly for a moment and then was still.

The old woman fell to the ground. Carefully the other servants cleaned her face and carried her away to sleep until she awakened. They did not speak to Amasa, except the Stablemaster, who looked at him oddly and asked, "Why would you want to live forever?"

Amasa shrugged. There was no use explaining that he wanted to ease the old woman's agony, and so killed it at its cause. Besides, Amasa was distracted, for now there was something buzzing in the base of his brain. The whirr of switches, infinitely small, going left or right; gates going open and closed; poles going positive and negative. Now and then a vision would flash into his mind, so quickly that he could not frame or recognize it. Now I see the world through butterfly's eyes. Now the vast mind of Hierusalem's machinery sees the world through mine.

GRAY WAITS by this window: it is the one. He does not wonder how he knows. He only knows that he was made for this moment, that his life's need is all within this window, he must not stray to hunt for food because his great stamen is throbbing with desire and in the night it will be satisfied.

So he waits by the window, and the sun is going; the sky is grey, but still he waits, and at last the lights have gone from the sky and all is silent within. He moves in the darkness until his long fingers find the edge of the stone. Then he pulls himself inside, and when his stamen scrapes painfully against the stone, immense between his legs, he only thinks: ease for you, ease for you.

His object is a great mountain that lies breathing upon a sea of sheets. She breathes in quick gasps, for her chest is large and heavy and hard to lift. He thinks nothing of that, but only creeps along the wall until he is above her head. He stares quizzically at the fat face; it holds no interest for him. What interests Gray is the space at her shoulders where the sheets and blankets and quilts fall open like a tent door. For some reason it looks like the leaves of a tree to him, and he drops onto the bed and scurries into the shelter.

Ah, it is not stone! He can hardly move for the bouncing, his fingers and toes find no certain purchase, yet there is this that forces him on: his stamen tingles with extruding pollen, and he knows he cannot pause just because the ground is uncertain.

He proceeds along the tunnel, the sweating body to one side, the tent of sheets above and to the other side. He explores; he crawls clumsily over a vast branch; and at last he knows what he has been looking for. It is time, oh, time, for here is the blossom of a great flower, pistil lush for him. He leaps. He fastens to her body as he has always fastened to the limbs of the great wife trees; to the stone. He plunges stamen into pistil and dusts the walls with pollen. It is all he lived for, and when it is done, in only moments when the pollen is shed at last, he dies and drops to the sheets.

THE QUEEN'S dreams were frenzied. Because her waking life was wrapped and closed, because her bulk forced an economy of movement, in her sleep she was bold, untiring. Sometimes she dreamed of great chases on a horse across broken country. Sometimes she dreamed of flying. Tonight she dreamed of love, and it was also athletic and unbound. Yet in the moment of ecstasy there was a face that peered at her, and hands that tore her lover away from her, and she was afraid of the man who stared at the end of her dream.



Still, she woke trembling from the memory of love, only wistfully allowing herself to recall, bit by bit, where she really was. That she was lost in the palace, that she was as ungainly as a diseased tree with boles and knots of fat, that she was profoundly unhappy, that a strange man disturbed her dreams.

And then, as she moved slightly, she felt something cold and faintly dry between her legs. She dared not move again, for fear of what it was.

Seeing that she was awake, a servant bowed beside her. "Would you like your breakfast?"

"Help me," she whispered. "I want to get up."

The servant was surprised, but summoned the others. As they rolled her from the bed, she felt it again, and as soon as she was erect she ordered them to throw back the sheets.

And there he lay, flaccid, empty, grey as a deflated stone. The servants gasped, but they did not understand what the Queen instantly understood. Her dreams were too real last night, and the great appendage on the dead body fit too well the memory of her phantom lover. This small monster did not come as a parasite, to drain her; it came to give, not to receive.

She did not scream. She only knew that she had to run from there, had to escape. So she began to move, unsupported, and to her own surprise she did not fall. Her legs, propelled and strengthened by her revulsion, stayed under her, held her up. She did not know where she was going, only that she must go. She ran. And it was not until she had passed through a dozen rooms, a trail of servants chasing after her, that she realized it was not the corpse of her monstrous paramour she fled from, but rather what he left in her, for even as she ran she could feel something move within her womb, could feel something writhing, and she must, she must be rid of it.

As she ran, she felt herself grow lighter, felt her body melting under the flesh, felt her heaps and mounds erode away in an inward storm, sculpting her into a woman's shape again. The vast skin that had contained her belly began to slap awkwardly, loosely against her thighs as she ran. The servants caught up with her, reached out to support her, and plunged their hands into a body that was melting away. They said nothing; it was not for them to say. They only took hold of the loosening folds and held and ran.

And suddenly through her fear the Queen saw a pattern of furniture, a lintel, a carpet, a window, and she knew where she was. She had accidentally stumbled upon a familiar wing of the palace, and now she had purpose, she had direction, she would go where help and strength were waiting. To the throne room, to her husband, where the king was surely holding his Invocation. The servants caught up with her at last; now they bore her up. "To my husband," she said, and they assured her and petted her and carried her. The thing within her leapt for joy: its time was coming quickly.

AMASA COULD not watch the ceremonies. From the moment he entered the Hall of Heaven all he could see were the butterflies. They hovered in the dome that was painted like the midsummernight sky, blotting out the tiny stars with their wings; they rested high on painted pillars, camouflaged except when they fanned their graceful wings. He saw them where to others they were far too peripheral to be seen, for in the base of his brain the gates opened and closed, the poles reversed, always in the same rhythm that drove the butterflies' flight and rest. Save the Queen, they said. We brought you here to save the Queen. It throbbed behind his eyes, and he could hardly see.

Could hardly see, until the Queen came into the room, and then he could see all too clearly. There was a hush, the ceremonies stopped, and all gazes were drawn to the door where she stood, an undulant mass of flesh with a woman's face, her eyes vulnerable and wide with fright and trust. The servants' arms reached far into the folds of skin, finding God-knew-what grip there: Amasa only knew that her face was exquisite. Hers was the face of all women, the hope in her eyes the answer to the hope of all men. "My husband!" she cried out, but at the moment she called she was not looking at the King. She was looking at Amasa.

She is looking at me, he thought in horror. She is all the beauty of Besara, she is the power of Kafr Katnei, she is the abyss of Ekdippa, she is all that I have loved and left behind. I do not want to desire them again.

The King cried out impatiently, "Good God, woman!"

And the Queen reached out her arms toward the man on the throne, gurgled in agony and surprise, and then shuddered like a wood fence in a wind.

What is it, asked a thousand whispers. What's wrong with the Queen?

She stepped backward.

There on the floor lay a baby, a little grey baby, naked and wrinkled and spotted with blood. Her eyes were open. She sat up and looked around, reached down and took the placenta in her hands and bit the cord, severing it.

The butterflies swarmed around her, and Amasa knew what he was meant to do. As you snapped the butterfly, they said to him, you must break this child. We are Hierusalem, and we were built for this epiphany, to greet this child and slay her at her birth. For this we found the man most holy in the world, for this we brought him here, for you alone have power over her.

I cannot kill a child, Amasa thought. Or did not think, for it was not said in words but in a shudder of revulsion in him, a resistance at the core of what in him was most himself.

This is no child, the city said. Do you think the dragons have surrendered just because we stole their trees? The dragons have simply changed to fit a new mate; they mean to rule the world again. And the gates and poles of the city impelled him, and Amasa decided a thousand times to obey, to step a dozen paces forward and take the child in his arms and break it. And as many times he heard himself cry out, I cannot kill a child! And the cry was echoed by his voice as he whispered, "No."

Why am I standing in the middle of the Hall of Heaven, he asked himself. Why is the Queen staring at me with horror in her eyes? Does she recognize me? Yes, she does, and she is afraid of me. Because I mean to kill her child. Because I cannot kill her child.

As Amasa hesitated, tearing himself, the grey infant looked at the King. "Daddy," she said, and then she stood and walked with gathering certainty toward the throne. With such dextrous fingers the child picked at her ear. Now. Now, said the butterflies.

Yes, said Amasa. No.

"My daughter!" the King cried out. "At last an heir! The answer to my Invocation before the prayer was done — and such a brilliant child!"

The King stepped down from his throne, reached to the child and tossed her high into the air. The girl laughed and tumbled down again. Once more the King tossed her in delight. This time, however, she did not come down.

She hovered in the air over the King's head, and everyone gasped. The child fixed her gaze on her mother, the mountainous body from which she had been disgorged, and she spat. The spittle shone in the air like a diamond, then sailed across the room and struck the Queen on her breast, where it sizzled. The but-

terflies suddenly turned black in midair, shriveled, dropped to the ground with infinitesimal thumps that only Amasa could hear. The gates all closed within his mind, and he was all himself again; but too late, the moment was passed, the child had come into her power, and the Queen could not be saved.

The King shouted, "Kill the monster!" But the words still hung in the air when the child urinated on the King from above. He erupted in flame, and there was no doubt now who ruled in the palace. The grey shadow had come in from the walls.

She looked at Amasda, and smiled. "Because you were the holiest," she said, "I brought you here."

AMASA TRIED to flee the city. He did not know the way. He passed a palmer who knelt at a fountain that flowed from virgin stone, and asked, "How can I leave Hierusalem?"

"No one leaves," the palmer said in surprise. As Amasa went on, he saw the palmer bend to continue scrubbing at a baby's hands. Amasa tried to steer by the patterns of the stars, but no matter which direction he ran, the roads all bent toward one road, and that road led to a single gate. And in the gate the child waited for him. Only she was no longer a child. Her slate-grey body was heavy-breasted now, and she smiled at Amasa and took him in her arms, refused to be denied. "I am Dalmanutha," she whispered, "and you are following my road. I am Acrasia, and I will teach you joy."

She took him to a bower on the palace grounds, and taught him the agony of bliss. Every time she mated with him, she conceived, and in hours a child was born. He watched each one come to adulthood in hours, watched them go out into the city and afix themselves each to a human, some man, some woman, or some child. "Where one forest is gone," Dalmanutha whispered to him, "another will rise to take its place."

In vain he looked for butterflies.

"Gone, all gone, Amasa," Acrasia said. "They were all the wisdom that you learned from my ancestors, but they were not enough, for you hadn't the heart to kill a dragon that was as beautiful as man." And she was beautiful, and every day and every night she came to him and conceived again and again, telling him of the day not long from now when she would unlock the seals of the gates of Hierusalem and send her bright angels out into the forest of man to dwell in the trees and mate with them again.

More than once he tried to kill himself. But she only laughed at him as he lay with bloodless gashes in his neck, with lungs collapsed, with poison foul-tasting in his mouth. "You can't die, my Saint Amasa," she said, "Father of Angels, you can't die. For you broke a wise, a cruel, a kind and gentle butterfly." ●

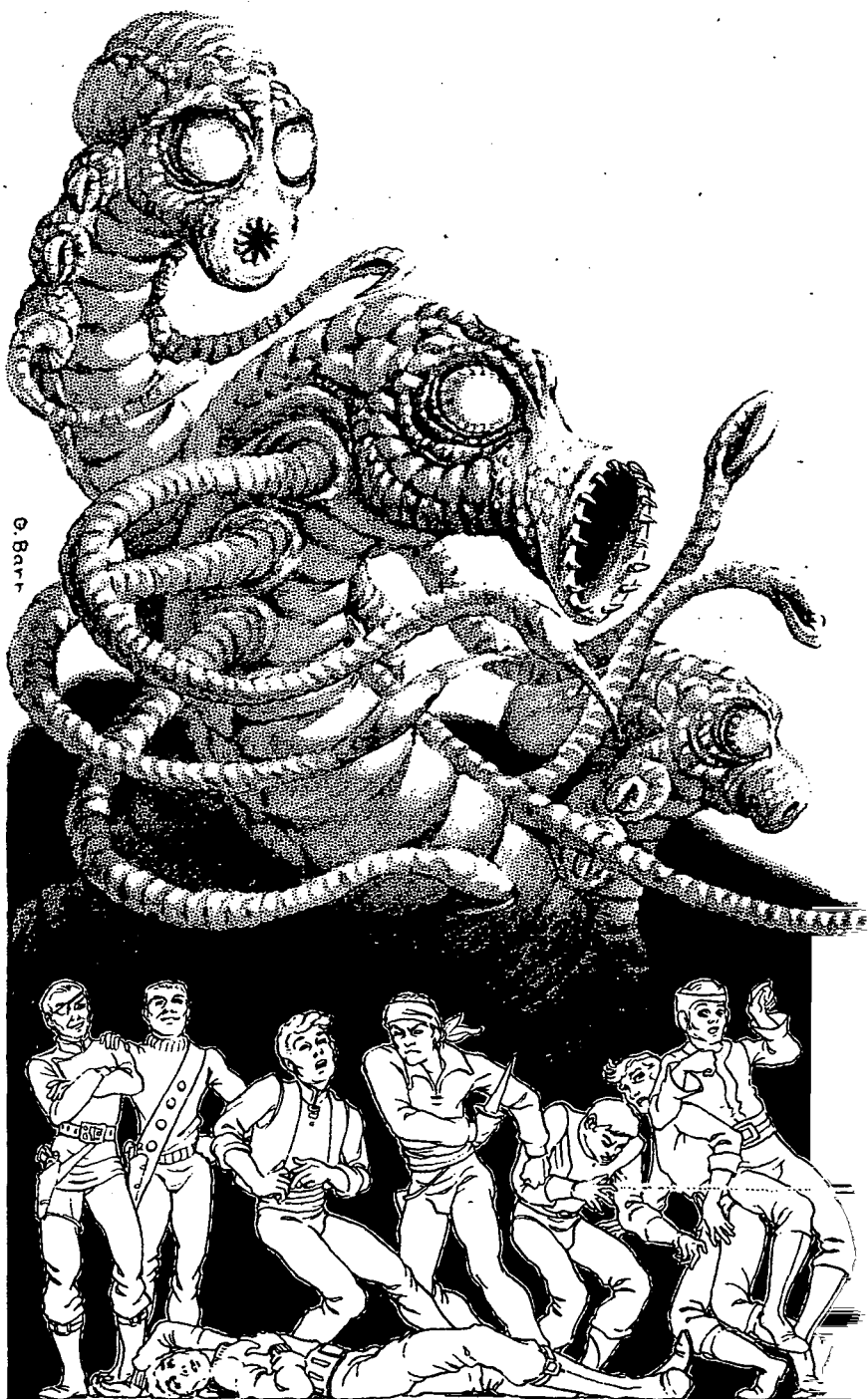
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## Orson Scott Card

Orson Scott Card, winner of the 1978 Campbell Award for best new writer, is the author of *Songmaster*, *A Planet Called Treason*, and *Unaccompanied Sonata and other Stories*. He has edited a pair of fantasy anthologies, *Dragons of Light* and *Dragons of Darkness*. He and his wife, Kristine Allen, are the parents of a son, Geoffrey, and a daughter, Emily.

### Editor's note:

The author told us he feels "A Plague of Butterflies" is the best piece he has ever written. It will appear in his anthology, *Dragons of Darkness*, this fall. — EM



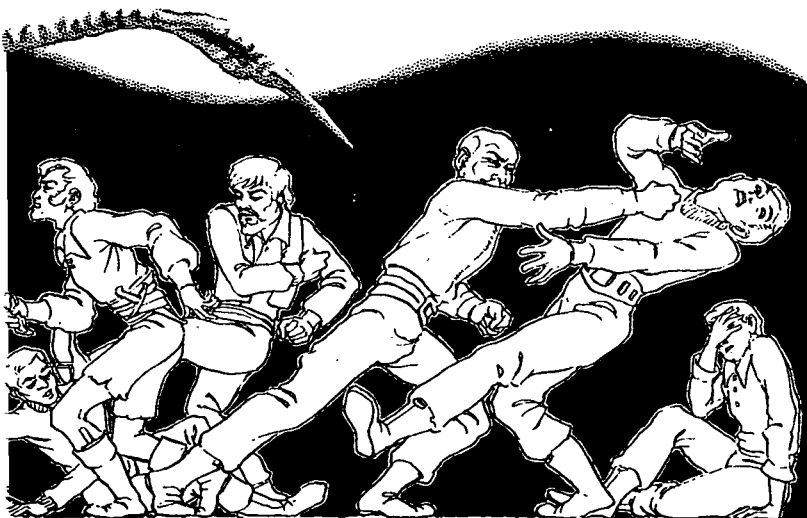
# **RICHARD ENGLEHART**

**A Story of Courage, Foolishness  
Greed, Lust and . . .**

## **In The End, The Essence**

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**Illustrated by George Barr**



**T**he night lowan, fifteen feet long, sinuous body twitching, was behind my brother who was about to die. He would not see much of his world again. He would not see his earth. He would never see the double moon of Talgar reflected in those large, plated scales, nor would he see those eyes behind him — the eyes, highly intelligent, knowing they had won, nor that sucking mouth, surrounded by three pair of undulating tentacles, hollow, poison-filled, their tips, bone-hard, needle sharp.

Lowan, my brother, felt the tentacles encircle his waist and then, held fast, the searing pain as four of the fang-tips penetrated, causing the nerve nuclei to explode in a chain-reaction from the injected venom, a chain reaction that would continue until every nerve cell in his body was destroyed. He screamed, my brother did — they tell me — I wasn't there.

He had discovered the creatures only the night before and, scientist, explorer that he was, was studying a few smaller ones. It wasn't clear whether the one that killed him was protecting the young or just killed for the hell of it — they do that, you know, these night lowans. They named them that in honor of my brother who died there, horribly, in the Moon Forest on Talgar, killed by a member of *cerebrinilapoda lowanii*, a creature as intelligent as it is deadly and as valuable as it is anything else.

Anyone who puts his life in jeopardy is a fool. My brother was a fool. I'm a fool too.

I didn't have quite the scientific training my brother had — dedicated, intelligent individual that he was, brave too. Of course he's dead and I'm alive. That makes me a live fool and him a dead one. That's one major distinction between us.

You see, in our essence we were the same, my brother and I. We were both ambitious. We were both intelligent. We both had courage. I guess you could say that essentially we had drive and the means to attain that towards which we were driven. And we were definitely driven towards separate goals. He was a bit stronger than I, but that didn't matter much. He was a good deal better looking and that did matter. However, these weren't, as my mother had said, the real differences. She thought that he would make something of himself due to his virtues and that I would disgrace the family name, or rather that I would continue to do so, I should say, having already

started doing so in her eyes by getting bounced out of the Stel-Med Academy for some political rioting and seducing Kara, the University president's rather young daughter. Lowan, however graduated with honors. Those were the differences that Mother saw, but they were really superficial. The split deep down was in why he and I decided we were alive. He was dedicated to anybody but himself — to science mainly, but ultimately to anybody that needed or wanted him.

I, on the other hand, dedicated myself to me. I would do nothing for anyone unless I would gain. I had to. Nobody else would. His sycophants would have given themselves gladly, body and soul had my golden brother asked. Of course, they couldn't.

When it comes down to it, that final time, no matter how golden you are, you have to do it by yourself. Nobody dies for you. You can live your life for somebody else. You can give your gifts to somebody else. But your death is yours alone.

Lowan lived for a cause. That was noble of him and perhaps if the night lowans hadn't killed him they wouldn't have been looked at as closely as they had been, and it would have taken longer to learn that their poison can be made into the perfect perfume and aftershave. It yields to an ancient *enfleurage* process, the attar being extracted from the *pomade* with a *gustometer*. Only one distillation is necessary to produce an absolute. The strange aspect of the *lowantoxin* is that even as an absolute it needed no fixer. It was an essence of almost no volatility.

Of course, there are other animals that have expellations of one sort or another that are used in perfume — the spidgyres of Fornal, the musk glands of the female Kark wolf and the vomit of the fish-like garnal from that watery planet... *Agua*... something or other, to name a few. But of all the substances, only the *lowantoxin* didn't need a fixative and an essence combined.

This aspect of the *lowantoxin*, called *lowinium atrapalimine*, would have made it extremely valuable in itself. It was, however, the other facet that made it even more valuable than the fabled Pergrin Gem, over which the Dellish wars were fought.

*Lowantoxin* was a true aphrodisiac. It entered both the nervous and reproductive



system through the olfactory organs. So far it seems to have been one hundred percent effective — this deadly poison, this brother killer, that when slightly refined and worn as an aftershave becomes a "ladykiller."

It gets you in the mood if you aren't and, as a bonus, as if one was needed, aids your performance. It does work. I've tried it. So have a few hundred others — all satisfied prospective customers and tremendous advertisers.

What would you give — how much — to date that girl, that one you've admired from afar, and know now, be absolutely sure, that since she's going out with you, the culminating event of the evening is in the bag? She doesn't even have to like you, merely get a whiff of your aftershave, which is activated when you need it by patting on a talc also made from the toxin. And she is yours — totally, at least for several hours. Then the effects wear off and it takes a week before she'll succumb again.

It was this aspect of *L. atrapalimine* that caused the problem with the law. For the short time it was used, the question was raised that perhaps a new definition of rape would have to be considered. The girls not only submitted, they demanded, and yet after the effects wore off they, at times, at least some of them, decided that the essence had made them act against their will. There were trials and the courts bogged down. While the extremely slow process of interplanetary law ground along, the stuff was declared illegal, so naturally, the price, which was very high to start with, was now galactic. The only availability of the essence was the small supply brought back by Lowan's Intrepid group. Some legitimate experiments were carried out and a bit of the stuff got onto the "street" as the ancient saying goes. A number of mercenaries attempted to increase the supply. Most of them died the same horrible, swift death my golden brother had. The collecting of lowans was not an easy process.

THE POTENTIAL benefits for this living brother outweighed the risks, however, and I decided to pursue things with my own customary abandon.

The Moon Forest of Talgar had been declared off limits after the tragedy. A laser fence surrounded it and prison without trial was the immediate penalty for arrested trespassers. Still, a laser fence is a joke for anyone with a knowledge of post-

dispersion and fractional deflection and I was into the forest before the break was detected. I saw the guard-bots and sentries looking for the interference but they weren't really interested in coming into the forest. Rumors were all over and already the Moon Forest was becoming legendary.

Getting out after a few weeks of collecting presented a bit more difficulty because I was now encumbered with several deep sacks of live lowans. I had to bring them along since the extraction of the poison is a laboratory process; besides I didn't want to mess with them on their own territory.

To avoid discovery, I walked in on foot and now, had to leave the same way, a three day trek across the wold-waste of Talgar, famous in its own right. On the third day I stumbled into Deander, a little village but big enough for me to have hidden a short distance ship in. The native Fraggites, always eager for ordinary earth coal-oil which they used to get drunk on in ways that I considered obscene, had tended my ship.

These short-distance Betties were large enough to get the game to the parent planet called Tal-Talgar in this two-planet system. Tal-Talgar had become a stop-over point for just about every ship moving between the Bella-don and the Tycho systems. Everyone knows what these border planets are like, and Tal-Talgar is one of the worst. The entrance and exit paths of the planet were heavily scanned and patrolled. A small ship could probably get out carrying contraband, but it couldn't make it even to the nearest planet without refueling several times. Even if that could be arranged, there are several asteroid belts, occasional meteorite showers and magnetic storms — space here was dirty and at its worst — presenting difficulties for even the largest of transports. My Bettie could get me and my lowans to this planet, but I would have to make other arrangements to leave.

Anyway, I had made it this far and had done it alone. I was on the planet with nine lowans, confined one to a sack. It hadn't been difficult, just like playing hide-and-go-seek with a very painful death. I only managed to get them this far because I discovered a triangular patch where the throat joins the body, which is absent of plates. I killed a number of them before I figured the right dosage. Since they communicate mentally, I had no doubt that they knew who I was and what I had planned for

them. Oh yeah, the right dosage . . . I used cobolotone, a very potent tranquilizer. It's still not easy; you have to get in under the tentacles.

My difficulty now was to find a ship large enough to make the run to one of the near planets that was less patrolled. That meant that I would have to find someone who was willing to smuggle something unknown — several sacks of it, no less. I figured if I revealed the contents the price would be too high — or the mandatory prison sentence for getting caught would scare him off — so he'd have to be willing to go along with the deal no questions asked.

It was night and I decided to make the rounds of the . . . ahh . . . establishments in what they call the Garuum Phallos, what we would call on earth, even now, the red light district.

The buildings in the Garuum Phallos were at one time beautiful structures, homes mostly, with what were probably huge lawns in front. Now the lawn areas were filled in with some kind of concrete mixed with a colored shale. From the air it had sort of a quilt-work effect.

For the extroverts and voyeurs, there were a few mattresses — what they called *kalmers*, with a synthetic, spongey core — and plenty of bounce — plus a wrapping of nor husk, a natural fiber with the texture of fur. Very nice. These were outside the establishments, complete with girls or whatever your taste runs to, who were willing performers. At one of these showplaces, *Thingos*, a pub that caters to the bizarre, I noticed a group of cosmotains, sitting at tables which they had pulled up around a *kalmers*. They were imbibing whazoo, a drink better left undescribed, and were into betting, apparently, on the ability to change positions without withdrawal and the number of possible positions before discharge, an event that, when it occurred, brought a cheer from the bettors.

I walked over. Cosmotains as a group were interesting, a combination of tramp transporters, pirates and mercenaries all combined. I never knew one that didn't have a prison record and wasn't on some stellar want-list, a fact they prided themselves on. I knew a few of them, though I doubt if my brother, bless him, did. He didn't run in the same circles as I. He wouldn't be here trying to find someone to help him smuggle some lowans off this

planet.

I recognized one of them, name of Garn and just as I reached the table, a younger man screamed at him. Garn was a Ragshier and you could tell that he didn't enjoy being called a "sperm spawn of a flick." The old guy enjoyed it even less when this younger fellow, the one that had yelled at him, then threw a table. Garn sidestepped and it was the girl on the *kalmers* who screamed next as the table caught her then present lover at the base of his skull, killing him in naked ecstasy.

There was a small group of young guys that kept urging this Lux to go ahead and get the old Shetscra, that he had it coming. I could see the expression change on Lux's face when he decided to go for him and he moved in, kind of nice — it wasn't his first fight — and he caught Garn across the bridge of his nose with the edge of his hand. The blow was slightly high and Garn twisted, the movement causing Lux to miss the attempt to drive the broken nose cartilage into the brain.

Lux wasn't slowed by disappointment because he smashed two quick left jabs into the gnarled face and Garn went down. I don't think it was the blows. He just wanted to gain some time.

Overconfident, Lux moved in wanting to stomp the old face that was bleeding from the nose. Garn, on his back, rocked onto his shoulders with the agility that always surprised me when I saw it but that I knew was normal for Ragshiers. Lux had missed his first stomp and I didn't think Garn would give him another chance. The old guy let his Muck boot explode under Lux's chin and the kid staggered back with blood dripping from his dislocated jaw.

The Ragshier slid in sideways, crab-like, cautious; Lux, still game, swung for the old man's adam's apple, knowing he needed to put him away fast. What happened was fast, but not the way Lux wanted it. Garn parried the blow, dipped and pivoted his body across the waist of the younger man. He brought his knee up into the kid's groin and smashed his elbow back into the young kidney. If he wasn't dead when he went down, he would wish for it the next time he wanted a woman, if there was a next time.

I happened to glance at the sizeable crowd that had gathered. I've always been fascinated by the glint in the watchers' eyes, the tremendous vicarious lift showing in their entrancement.

Then I sensed a movement that didn't belong. One of the kid's young friends had unsheathed his diffuser and was about to chop down the old cosmotain. At this range, he couldn't miss Garn, though he'd likely take a few of the crowd as well, diffusers being what they are in close quarters. A prate is a much better weapon and in the fraction it took me to act, I found myself wondering not what to do, I knew that, but what my big brother would have done — assuming that he would ever have found himself in a situation like this — you know, a large group and the need to kill a man quickly without hitting anybody else. They didn't teach this at Stel-Med. My prate blipped-in with a harmless sounding, high-pitched whine and the guy's diffuser fell from his blackened hand; his corpse followed it, resting beside Lux who twitched, indicating that, at least, he wasn't dead.

I moved to Garn's side, my weapon in view, a challenge to the crowd, but nobody else was interested in participating. To keep the odds in our favor, Garn and I backed away. There were many young faces in the crowd. More faces seem younger these days.

Garn was laughing and the faces parted to let us through.

"Tomorrow is always good," he was saying. "Tomorrow will be good for you all — time will calm all the heroes' balls and tonight, those of you who would kill me just for the null of it, if I stay — instead, tomorrow you will find me and you will tell in truth what a fighter I am — especially so because you must remember that I am forty-two and a Ragsher — when you are calm, find me, tell me how good I am and I will buy you whazoo until your eyes see Macartes and your ears hear the love song of the neshees. And my friend here, my friend with the very accurate prate, he will drink whazoo until he dies and will never pay another lartel."

At the edge of the crowd, in the grand style of the Minson fighters, we dramatically turned our backs and strolled casually down the passageway, arms around each other, talking loudly, carelessly, and I thinking all the time how great this must look, how dramatic we must appear — I've been the one for the dramatic flare, you know, not the virtuous one. At the same time, I expected the possibility of being cut down by any one of the dozen different types of weapons in the crowd. I mumbled my concern to Garn.

"Them, hah! Them shoot men in the back? My friend, my friend, it can never happen. In space have I been these last thirty Catos and one does not travel so far and not learn — if, if, of course, one travels with his mind awake. It is true that in space, one does not travel far without an awake mind. I've learned, my pugo, that some things are natural, some not so. For types like these to shoot a real man when he is holding them with his will, is unnatural."

"I'm glad to hear that. I was a bit concerned that I was gonna get myself killed."

"Keep thinking like that and you will."

"What do you mean?" I think I knew what he was going to say. I thought I'd let him. After all, I might learn something. I'm more prone to learning from people who've been through it rather than from those who've read about it. Besides, if I let him talk, he'd be more prone to my suggestions about the smuggling.

"Act with assurance — as if they are guard-bots programmed to your smallest wish and they'll never disappoint you. Doubt, my pugo, is the epitaph of more adventurers than I care to name."

I looked at him and I guess I revealed more than I had intended,

"Ahh, with that look, you show yourself to be younger than one would take you considering your beard. Pugo, take what is offered when it is offered. You can always throw away the bad parts later on."

"OK."

"Let me say this; when you know what you're doing, everybody around you will let you do it. When you believe that you're doing something right so will the others around you. You can be as wrong as you want, but as long as you hold the others with your will, you can live through it. Try rememberin' that."

We stooped to enter a dismal establishment with one greenish corald lamp over the bar. It was quiet and there were several empty tables. I steered Garn to one in a deep, silent corner.

"Amby," he called to the server.

"Garn, do you know everybody in the Garuum Phallos area?"

He looked at me, his eyes coruscant, and I had to answer my question.

"I know... Thirty Catos and you learn... right?"

"Pugo, you either learn or you're space dust. Amby, I'll have straight whazoo, a four-finger glass and leave the cont. What'll

you have, pugo? Whazoo too much for you?"

"Null no. Garn, I'm not going to try to match you, but you're not messing with some fuzzface here. Whazoo's fine."

I heard myself saying it, knowing I couldn't handle the stuff, knowing I hated the taste and fully aware that when I woke up tomorrow, I would wish I had told Garn the truth.

That evening went just about the way I thought it would. The first part is etched in clean lines — I have a good memory. The part after the sixth four-fingers glass of whazoo eludes me. Somewhere in there, I believe I made a deal with the Cosmotain Garn of the plex Uto-Vagrom, Ragsher and Dean of the Garnuum Phallós. I didn't remember what it was but it was probably for some ridiculous sum, the amount of which I was sure he would remind me. However, all he knew was that he was to transport me and my sacks. Whatever else I may have said, I didn't reveal the contents.

**TWO DAYS LATER** — It took that long for my head to clear, my eyes to stop watering and my stomach to figure out its proper location in my body — anyway, two days later, I helped Garn and his crew rig his ship, *The Bruodor*. It was one of the few ships in this sector that had been built specifically for smuggling. Yet, as I talked to him, I realized that Garn wasn't a smuggler. He would smuggle and no matter what the law says, that does not make him a smuggler. He did it when he wanted to, not as a business — only, as he put it: "When the white roses need a touch of lavender."

Garn was a merchant spaceman and interested only in traveling the galaxy and enjoying what he was doing, again, as he put it: "Pugo, I am a major constellation, a brother to the stars."

I told him of a smuggler that I knew of that got rich.

"Pugo, I know twenty. There aren't two that I'd take the time to piss on. Money that isn't spent rots the soul and spirit. Each man is able to handle only a certain amount of money. When he gets one larthal more than that, in Garn's law, that says that the money owns him."

The lowans were stowed behind a false panel between the hold and the passenger quarters. The panels were immense and bulky but operated on a hidden sliding track so that they rolled smoothly away. Their

size made them appear as a natural part of the ship.

Though Garn had a great deal of stowage area, this time he carried only a meager cargo, twenty passengers, me and my lowans.

His passengers were culled from those who applied that he developed a feeling for. He charged what he felt, the accommodations were slight but he never lacked for occupants when he wanted them. When they signed on, they knew there were no guarantees, this part of space being patrolled by both the law and the pirates and most of the passengers being wanted by at least one of the groups. Garn had had his share of being boarded by either side. On his *Bruodor*, there had been several battles and enough blood shed to make one aware that any trip admitted the possibility of more than just a journey from one planet to another.

Helping us get to that planet was Garn's crew of five. Garn boasted that he could run the ship alone or with less crew than that if need be, but that these poor beings were milksopped and needed an education in space that only he could give. He had, he told me, four willing pupils this trip, those that had been with him on at least one trip. He also had one whom he called a "Glooper" — a play on the glob lopers of Farnel — incredibly slow-to-learn beasts of burden, used in the gash mines. His glooper was a terranlan named Jaeger, "A fine engineer," Garn said, "but dangerous. He believes in heroes and sacrifices."

When Garn was telling me about Jaeger, we were six days out and he and I were sitting on the bridge; he had shifted my topic on duty around to his favorite topic:

"Man's first duty is to the pleasures of the flesh. Once he has enough whazoo, women or an acceptable substitute and enough sense alters, then he should have no more money."

"Garn, you always bring these things back to money."

"And well I should. It doesn't take a grand pulsar to see how the money is tied up these days — and how we all suffer because of it. Once man has what he needs, his money should be gone — allow the money to circulate, give it where it is needed — to everyone."

"Why not save something for old age?"

"Old age! There should be no such thing. If a man can't drink whazoo, be good to his

lust and enter the door of the spirit, he's lived a day too long. Remember that 'tain at Thingos, the one killed by the table thrown at me? On a whore. That's the way to go out."

The ship suddenly went dead. I was aware of a tremendous surge of energy — then — nothing. Garn hurled a few epithets at the ship, at space in general and then started in on the engineer, Jaeger. Garn, while appearing sloppy and unkempt to outsiders, was anything but that. He followed his own rules to the letter and would brook no incompetence. Jaeger worked hard at convincing his cosmotain that the fault was neither his nor the ship's and that we could begin a scan. It took little time to discover a *kea* prowling off our blind side bouncing a power-staller off of us. The *kea* is a medium range ship large enough to be comfortable, small enough to maneuver — an extremely agile craft, this one; it also had a full complement of arms. There was no way to fight her. If we missed with our first blast, the *kea* could tear us apart, little by little.

Garn's *Bruodor* was a transport and only had two *dishablers*, good weapons but hardly effective against a *kea*. The *kea*'s sensors apparently picked up our scansion and, worried that we would report, trained their mauls on our transmitter and shattered it. The thump rocked the *Bruodor*, and the passengers, in panic, joined us on the bridge.

Garn was furious that they had hit us but there was only a slight edge to his voice as he indicated the viewing screen.

"That," he said, "is Saveragel. You will meet him. Together we mucked through the stars from the oopla mines on Arangus to being the only men to walk out of the Pangle Swamps of Meynhen after our supertransport winged in there. Five hundred and fifty beings on that flight and only Saveragel and myself survived. And now look at him, blasting off my transmitter. He knows well that never would I call patrol on him."

"Saveragel? Isn't he the one that heads that earth-based gang of pirates?"

"As I said... 'you will meet him'. The group they fondly call themselves is 'The Fiduciaries.'"

The woman passenger whom I marked as a Narbit from the tatoo on her cheek, asked Garn why he wouldn't have called patrol.

The cosmotain laughed and first asked how many of his passengers would prefer that the patrol know of their whereabouts. Their silence answered his question.

"That is as I thought. But there is more. I will tell you briefly a story before they board us. In that time you may watch them magna-kedge to our entry way. Few have the skill of Saveragel.

"When he and I were in the Pangle Swamps it happened that we were captured by a tribe name of Brooders. We learned that the plan was to sacrifice one of us to a pagan swamp god. The other would be released. We were to do the choosing — which to die... which to go free.

"Both of us volunteered to be the sacrifice. The tribe did not like that suggestion, so it was natural that we both then decided to leave. It was a fight that we almost lost and, in saving me from the blade of the chief, Saveragel lost his right hand.

"Not long after, this man and myself became blood brothers in the very primitive rites of the No-Men. This man who is about to rob you is my brother who gave his hand for me. And that is why I am angry that he would destroy my transmitter. He should know a man does not call patrol on his brother."

While Garn told us the story we watched the *kea* called *The Mahound*, maneuver and lock up to our ship. Just before we were introduced to Saveragel and his group, the same Narbit remarked to Garn that one also did not steal from one's brother.

"True. The way Saveragel sees it, he is not stealing from me. He is stealing from you. Please do nothing foolish for he would not hesitate to kill you."

Saveragel made his entrance in grand style with twenty *Fiduciaries* entering the bridge pushing Garn's crew, myself and the other passengers into a huddle at the center of the bridge. When the walls were lined with his men, garish, unkempt, fierce-looking with weapons drawn, he strode in. Garn, who had not appeared to notice the pirates as they prodded us but not him, threw his arms around the chief. Big men both of them, and fearful antagonists, they were brother-close though in many ways, strangers.

"Saveragel, why do you destroy my transmitter?"

"Garn, Garn. I did not do this thing. A new member of my group of friends

thought that you would call out and without consulting me, he fired."

"Youth can be impetuous. Did you show him his error?"

"He was notified. I, myself, will pay to have your transmitter repaired."

"That is generous. Will you have some whazoo?"

"A good idea."

Garn produced two containers of the vile stuff and my recently healed stomach pivoted. They stood, face to face, bottles tilted, gulping it down, each watching the other's face and bottle. I wasn't sure whether the game was to finish first or have the other stop for a breath. It didn't matter. They tied as both emptied the conds and laughing, again embraced, the bottles clattering to the floor.

"Garn, are your passengers able to afford Saveragel?"

"You will have to take that up with them."

"Ah, yes, lovely creatures, every one. Brothers and sisters stand you there. In the Book, it is writ of kindness towards fellows in need. You should give, when able, to a brother unfulfilled."

Then, in apparently rehearsed order, his men worked their way through the crowd, very thoroughly, systematically, you know. They were respectful, these pirates, of one's person, for instance not touching intimately even the most provocative of our female guests.

However, no matter how harmless they appeared or how friendly they operated, they were there to steal and worse if it came to that. They were colorful, quaint almost, smiling, dynamic and very deadly.

One of Saveragel's men, Kwall, had brushed by me and I had given him anything that I had of value — rather skimpy — though he fared better with a few others. My concern was not for what I had on my person but for the lowans, and I couldn't help seeing in my mind while all this was going on an image of my brother pointing his finger at me saying, "See what all this is doing to you."

Jaeger, the engineer, seemed all right until it came his turn to contribute to the spoils and his reaction was spontaneous, vicious, carried out with determination and skill.

When Kwall reached inside Jaeger's side pouch, Jaeger turned to him and made a quick motion back and forth with his right

hand across Kwall's body. Kwall spun around in surprise, already dead for all practical purposes, not understanding what had happened. He issued a gasp and looked at his abdomen as the passengers around him pushed against and blended in to each other, giving room to the activity.

What he saw was his stomach ripped open in an "X" slashed by a par, the fighting knife/brass knuckles combination of the Fainoooses. The center of the "X" gaped widely and his intestines were bulging out, his dirty shirt, red sodden. Before anyone was aware that there were those who would resist the pirates, Jaeger had grabbed Kwall's hand maul and had sliced two other pirates with the par — one of these across the throat, the other only across his bicep, not so serious but, with the bleeding and severed muscle, taking him out of the fray.

Sides there were then. Only three passengers chose to participate and join forces with Jaeger. The others, screaming, shouting, shifting, attempted to get out of the center of the bridge where the action was localized. The pirates, wanting to quell the disturbance, were forcing their way through the parameters of the crowd, trying to find the specific individuals causing the problem. The mass became a confused animal, ameboid, a crazy textured weaving, passionately involved with an impossible purpose: part of the beast involved with the entanglement, causing it or attempting to cause its cease; another part concerned only with its own separation from the first — the whole creature — movement sparked and given extended form through sound: shrieks, walls and turbulent, profane grunts and guttural orders hurled into the center of the shapeless thing.

Four passengers were quickly killed, none of them being involved with anything except being in the wrong place. I fell to the floor to play dead. It seemed the safest move. Even so, I picked up a deflected maul blast that injured my left shoulder, the pain excruciating, though the wound not severe; as I lay there, stomped and kicked, the melee of innocence and guilt sorted itself out.

I don't believe the fracas lasted more than three minutes. Neither Garn nor Saveragel were involved. They stood intrigued and off to one side while Jaeger and the three passengers locked dauntlessly into a furious hand-to-hand with a shifting wall of pirates.



The muddle of scuffling feet worked its way over me and I heard the grating clink of a diffuser. There were screams, different in pitch now, of both pirates and passengers, a scramble of movement and a sudden silence.

Piercing that quiet envelope then was the bellowing laughter of Saveragel and Garn, arms around each other.

"I didn't think," Saveragel roared, "that you would resist me. Where is our sodality?"

"That would be folly. You will note that I didn't resist."

"The crewman that started it?"

"A Glooper, obviously as new to me as the one of your group that destroyed my transmitter."

"I suppose you will have to search for a new engineer."

"Sooner or later."

Garn noticed me and laughed, walked over and helped me up. "Well, pugo, well done and you survived. How do you feel? Want some whazoo?"

I refused and took stock of what had happened. The diffuser had killed all three of the rebellious passengers and two pirates. Garn continued to fill me in on what I couldn't see. The Glooper took on Kulder Kwin, one of Saveragel's better known men. He had been thrown out of the omnilympics because he had accidentally killed his opponent in the Oma event. He is quite expert with the oma as our Glooper can now testify.

Garn introduced me to Saveragel who had his men lock the remaining passengers in their quarters. My shoulder hurt like null, but I felt I couldn't keep Garn's respect if I mentioned it. Saveragel laughed, clapped me on my aching shoulder and considered the tally:

"It seems your Glooper killed two good men and injured another. As well, I lost two others who must have become careless. Luckily for him, your engineer that started this is dead as well as seven other passengers. I hope that you collect your fares in advance."

Garn said, "It was a good fight. Rather entertaining."

"I would say so," added Saveragel. "Yet I was surprised at this much resistance."

"No more so than I. Saveragel, I rarely believe in fighting my brother. You do know had I so chosen to act, the fighting would yet be continuing."

"That I do believe. Garn, old pugo, what are you carrying in the hold?"

"There is little. For the most a few machine parts for the outer stations. This trip is mostly one of pleasure. Of course you may have them if you so wish."

"I have no need for what is yours. Satisfy my curiosity further. Do you have anything interesting in your compartments?"

I felt my mouth going dry. The pain in my shoulder intensified. If the lowans were found, I wondered what the pirates would do. They were not valuable to anyone who did not of their worth and have facilities to use their poison. It was possible that they didn't know what a lowan was. I considered the attempt to pass them off as pets and wondered if the lowans would cooperate.

Garn told him that all he carried in his compartments were nine sacks that belonged to me.

"Ahh! And what," he asked giving me full attention, his arm around me and he standing a full head taller, "is in those bags that my friend and brother is transporting? Could there be gold? Lockite? Ignoviz? Diamonds? Porgems?"

I told him that the sacks did not contain valuable minerals or gems.

"Very good, friend of Garn, and that tells me a great deal about what is not in the bags. I do believe that what you say is true. So now we move to the next step. What is in the bags?"

He emphasized the question by giving my injured shoulder a firm squeeze. I tried not to wince. I wasn't successful. I glanced at Garn who appeared equally a curious as Saveragel, in an impassive sort of way.

Words came and went in my mind as I tried to formulate a response. Nothing seemed to be good enough to appease him.

"Well, it would appear that our friend here, Garn, lacks the manners that are required — when one is asked a question, one answers it. What are you hiding?"

I could see no answer that would be satisfactory and as I looked at the bodies scattered around the deck, I knew that this man did not spend much idle time — yet I couldn't think of a lie that would work and I felt that the truth wouldn't work either.

"Garn," he said, "our friend and brother here, is reluctant to speak. I believe I understand his position. He is interested in our learning for ourselves — a good teacher, him."

He walked over to the panels and slid them back. The compartment was quite large and the nine bags seemed a ridiculously small load.

Saveragel picked up one of the bags with his prosthetic right hand.

"Not very heavy."

He directed his men to open the sacks and I found my voice.

"I wouldn't do that. . . It. . . They're dangerous."

"He speaks. I am disappointed Garn, for the first words he has for me are a warning. Worry not, pugo, I will exercise caution."

It was strange the way it happened next. With all of space to choose from, an asteroid or meteor, we never did learn which one, chose to occupy the same place we were. There was a terrific crash and the ship rolled and shuddered violently.

I was knocked off my feet and as I fell I could see others going down as well in the instant before the lights went out, throwing the ship into total darkness.

There were confused shouts, angry swearing and a few moans indicating at least some injuries. There was total darkness within the ship but it seemed that, since we were still alive, the inner hull hadn't ruptured. I didn't know how the passengers were faring and really didn't care as I took stock of my present situation. I wasn't injured but was lying on my back and could not get my bearings. I waited for a pause in the cursing, some of it deeply profound, and yelled for Garn.

"No need to shout," came the reply fairly close to my right. "I do suppose that you're wonderin' if the auxilliary lights will function or not. Think no more about it. They are supposed to come on when the main lights blow. Obviously, that did not happen. Saveragel, pugo of mine, are you near the manual control.?"

Saveragel's voice entered the darkness:

"I am near the panel. A moment and we will have an answer."

He added a short, barking command that quieted the muddle of voices and plunged the bridge into silence except for the shuffling sound of his feet. A sudden clatter and an epithet that bounced off the walls indicated that his dark vision was not as acute as the Penulp's sand worms.

The pause that followed grew longer. Garn was impatient.

"Sav, how is that doing?"

"My advice is to get accustomed to living

in the dark."

"You mean the manual doesn't work either?" I asked. I didn't really want the fact affirmed.

"Garn," Saveragel called, "you have a few corald lamps, do you not?"

"There are two. One is under and to the right of the auxilliary panel."

The soft slide of the panel door was followed by a silence in which I imagined Saveragel's hand, his only good one, probing for the lamp. Then a dim glow pushed the darkness back a bit. Garn's curse indicated how he felt about not checking on the deteriorated generators. It gave enough light to find the other lamp and Garn detailed his crew to assess the damage. They took one of the lamps and left the other with us. Except for the detailed crew, none of those remaining had moved very much.

From the direction of the hidden cargo hold came the scream, sudden and frantic, all the more chilling because it had the clotting glove of death spun into it, a sound, once identified, that becomes a part of your mind, stored somewhere just beyond the sanity level.

Saveragel had the lamp and swung the tired beam in the direction of the scream-sound that then became the thump of a falling body.

The beam of the lamp was weak and yellowed, better only slightly than the darkness and I could watch Saveragel's progress as he worked his way into the cargo compartment.

"Saveragel, stop!" It was blurted. I knew that one of his men had been killed by a night lowan and I felt that if he were killed, Garn would blame me. I pretended to believe that the reason that I was concerned was that Garn would show his displeasure by physically man-handling me. But even in the darkness, adrift in space, my thoughts converged on my brother who probably couldn't help his being golden anymore than I could help being in my present situation.

"What is your problem, unmannered one?"

"I don't think you should move around until you can see exactly where you're going."

"I assume that you have some reason other than the protection of a bag's contents."

I pulled myself into a sitting position.

"Did you get any of the sacks open?"

"What would I have found if I had done so?"

"Did you get any opened? If you did — and I think your man opened at least one — don't move. I was smuggling night lowans."

The mention of the word caused a ripple of murmurs from those left on deck. Saveragel asked in rather blunt terms if any of his men had opened a sack. There were three positive answers. They had gotten the sacks open but the crash knocked them out of the pirate's hands.

Garn said, "Pugo, your brains must be young. Saveragel, we should at least give him credit for the capture of nine such creatures."

"Then we will also give him credit for the recapture of those three now missing."

"I can't recapture them. I don't have the cobolamine or my tranquilizer gun. I'm not going to hunt around in the dark for those things. When the lights come on, we can all hunt them and blast them."

"Pugo," Garn said, "they won't be blasted. You will own this thing. It is yours. We others will make our way out of here and you will either bag those things or die trying."

"I don't think anyone should move," I said. "They've only killed one. If they had wanted to, they could have finished off almost all of us. They have sensory organs that allow them to navigate in complete darkness and to some degree, read our minds. They're waiting for something. My guess is that if you try to leave, they'll get you at the door. If you've never seen a man die that way, you're lucky. I think if we back to the wall and keep playing the lamp around we can just wait it out. When we have full light, they won't be that difficult to kill."

"Pugo," Garn's voice came to me from where I thought the door might be. He had moved. "Your plan will work well — we, all of us will move to the bulkhead — do so with caution. Follow here to the light — its beam is good for about four meters. Your plan is good to this point. From there we will follow my plan. You will stay. Do not be morose — frightened is OK, — angry is OK. Though I add that the more fright and anger you have, the less chance you will have."

"Garn," I said, now carefully sidestepping along the wall, "I'm not staying."

"Oh, but you are. It seems that you want to destroy your mistakes. I won't let you do

that. Remember, as a Ragsher, I must also teach and school has just started for you. You will stay, and alone. Once in the corridor, I will post a guard."

I stood, my fear holding me. I didn't know what Garn wanted. I suggested money, but even as I said it, I knew it was wrong. By then most of the men had made it through the door though some were injured and had to be helped — still the lowans didn't attack. Where were they? What did they want?

Garn continued, "If you show your face in the corridor before the lights are functioning again, remember the guard will have instructions to decrease the passenger list by one. There is something you must learn, something that cannot be put into words. Now is the time for you to learn."

"My alternative is death?"

"It would so seem."

"That's a pretty rough lesson."

"There are no easy ones, pugo. Some just harder than others. You will be on your own. Expect help from none."

The door opened and closed, even the dim light gone. I began to perspire, feeling very alone. Near the wall, I worked my way towards the door. My fright had turned to numbness and I conjured up all the word pictures I had heard about my brother as he had died. Strange but I could see him in this situation. Probably, if he were here, he'd do whatever I had to do for me. I couldn't help holding that thought a little longer.

I'm not sure why I was moving towards the door. I had no intention of testing Garn's word. It's possible that I felt I would better be able to get my bearings from a known fixed point.

As I reached it and explored the cold mega-steel with my hand, feeling very aware of myself at that moment, I brushed my foot against something else. I shouted and jumped back, terrified, more terrified at that moment than ever before or since.

When I leaped, I heard the object clatter, obviously not a lowan, and I searched through the darkness on the floor and my hand touched something with a quartz and metal feeling. It was the remaining corbal lamp. Garn had turned it off and left it by the door as he went out, left it for me, but didn't tell me. I was angry then. All I could think of was why he'd do this. Why didn't he tell me? I could have spent my entire time — perhaps my life fighting in total darkness.

I kicked it on. The lamp was very dim but, compared to nothing, it was light from the throne. Then I stood with my back to the door, the lamp playing in front and to my sides. My mind let go the puzzlement of Garn's actions. It let go my thought of escape and began to turn to the hunt, not fully sure which of us was the hunter. I had not yet considered things very closely but then was sorry that I did. I knew why the lowans had not attacked more. They were waiting. They were waiting for me to be alone. They remembered the Moon Forest of Talgar and my indiscriminate killing of their kith as I experimented with dosages. As soon as I had that thought, I heard a laugh, not a human laugh, not one heard with my ears, but with my mind. The lowans were picking up my feelings and, to some degree, my thoughts.

I stopped then. I decided that I could easily defeat myself but that the lowans were smart enough; they didn't need my help. I turned my thoughts to the lowans, dangerous creatures, but vulnerable as well. I had killed many of them and was ahead of the game — even if they got me — I was beginning to feel good.

As I tuned in my thoughts, I began to play my light in a particular direction — the urge to that direction was very strong and I noticed a movement, brief, furtive, under a control panel.

I allowed more concentration and realized that somehow the communication worked both ways. They could tie into my thoughts and feelings but I could tune into them as well. They were not far from me but I knew that they were not within striking distance either. I was surprised myself because I knew I had established some strange primitive communication with these snake-like creatures and I knew their intent — to kill me.

There in a strange space ship, one called *Bruodor*, in only faint light, my back against the cold metal of the bridge, I felt my fear leave. It seemed to dissolve. There was nothing in its place though I felt there should be.

I sensed them positioning themselves. Two of them coming in from my right side while the lowan under the control panel slithered into the lampbeam: It was close enough to strike but I knew it wouldn't until the other two positioned themselves.

As the other maneuvered, I decided that I would carry the fight to them. I wasn't go-

ing to wait, mildly passive. The fear had gone and something else was taking its place. Then I became aware that the two had stopped moving and the other was no longer just waiting; it was confused, unable to make a decision and my thoughts flickered back to Garn with his arm around me urging me not to doubt, to use my will.

I swung the lamp, hitting the nearest lowan in the face and jumped over it, again swinging the lamp hard to the head behind the tentacles, feeling the dull thump as the thing collapsed. I tripped as I landed and arched, falling towards one of the other lowans, gleaming briefly in the lamp. I thought I was going to fall on top of it, but it moved, changing position, ready to strike. I would be unable to get away. I knew it. On the floor, the lowan weaving above me, I decided the experience was worth it and tensed.

There was a sudden and blinding flash of light. The auxiliary units kicked in and the stab of brightness was unbearable to both myself and the lowans. I did manage to roll out of range, my hands to my eyes blotting out the light, the creature equally confused and equally intent on pursuing me. Then, eyes squinting, I looked up into its mouth as it rose up and reared back. The look in its eyes must have been the same look in the eyes of the one that killed my brother. I saw that look. I assumed that it would be the last thing I would see.

The ferocious growl of a hand maul was first, the blast striking the creature from behind, splattering it around the bridge and over me. Garn stood there, laughing as usual, the maul in his hand. He had never left, merely opened and closed the door, set down the light and stood aside.

He was a little too assured because the third lowan was near him and he did not see it. What he saw was me drawing my prate and firing as quickly as possible. The grin exchanged itself for surprise as he saw me pointing the weapon towards him. He was probably thinking that I was taking revenge because his hands went up in front of him as he rolled to one side as the prate blipped and the lowan, turned to charcoal, dropped sputtering next to him.

It's difficult to describe my feelings at that time. Whatever else they were, they were intense and I just lay looking at Garn who was sitting on the bridge railing smiling, not laughing, and nodding his head.

"Pugo, you'll do. Much there is to learn

and a little late you are in starting. But you'll do. You'll do, quite well."

Saveragel and his men came in as I sacked the injured Iowan. He decided that I could keep them — actually *insisted* is perhaps the better term. He hugged Garn and lightly tapped my chin as he left. I took a strange pride in having been given that much notice.

The kea pulled loose and I found myself rather popular with the passengers. While attempting an explanation of night Iowans

and aphrodisiacs, my thoughts drifted again to my brother and I found myself describing how the creatures came to be named after him. The Narbit said that I must be very proud to have such a famous brother. I looked at Garn supervising the removal of the remaining corpses from the bridge and told her that my brother was a "major constellation, a brother to the stars."

Perhaps, I thought, that is the essence of the universe. ●

## Richard Englehart

So, the coal-mining/steel town of Johnstown, PA — 10 miles from the "mythical" Jennerstown in the story, is where I come from.

It was there I fished and hunted and, informally, studied herpetology and nature... a continuing interest. It was there I hiked through Danny's woods, along Danny's stream and watched the subtle cruelty and explicit beauty of small town life. There too, I went to elementary and high school, developed an interest in art, animals and a hatred for school.

That, of course, is why I'm now a high school teacher with a masters in speech/drama. It only makes sense, I guess. I like it — high school teaching — here at Point Loma High in San Diego. I'm in love with the modern teenager — with the confusion and fears buffered with a real desire to learn and a thirst to find himself.

I've taught for fourteen years and, having gone through a period of near burn-out, I find myself now really enjoying the educa-

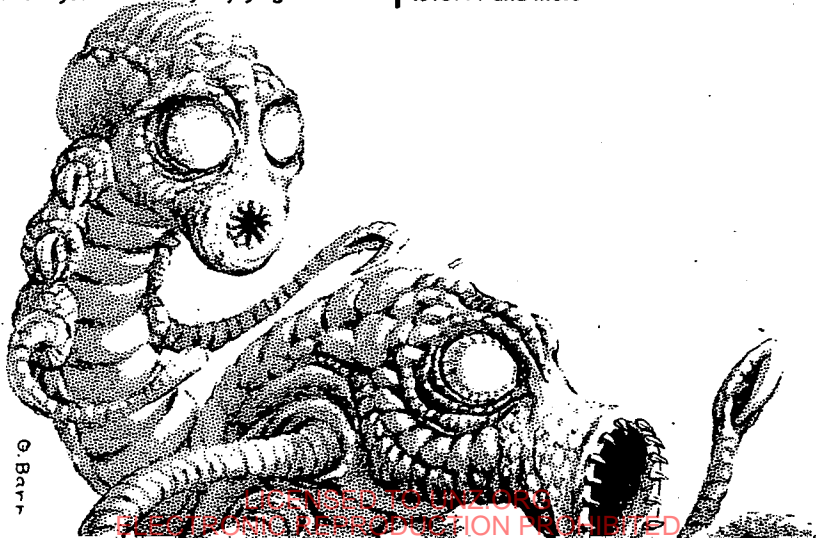
tion of, the relating to, the sharing with — just as I find myself being very disturbed by the pettiness, scapegoating, "police substituting," bungling, waste, ignorance and sheer inhumaness that occurs on all levels both within and without the educational system.

I also get tired of apologizing for a system that not only molds society but *reflects* it as well. I get tired... but I continue to do so.

As well, I enjoy theater which I've taught for ten years and have been involved with for twenty. I've directed, acted, designed sets for, written for, built sets for both educational and community theater.

I'm involved with cooking, photography, reading, psychology, philosophy and more...

I believe in fun, love, puppies, plants, letting spiders live, grandmothers, girls, Mark, Snoopy, Pogo, Working out, sloppiness, obsessions and letting go, the death of boredom, love of living, and just plain love... and more



# TAGMAN

**Michael P.  
Kube-McDowell**

*They were hated and feared  
because they were the Future.*



**Illustrated by James R. Odbert**



**T**he sweep began just after dawn.

It was early enough that the Outsiders were still in their riverside camp, sleepy and thinking of breakfast. But it was late enough for the Corporation's enforcers to see and its sungliders to fly. Carl Hegan had known the sweep was coming, and on the pretext of an early morning swim had crossed the river. There he found himself a spot on the high bank from which he could see the operation clearly, and waited.

The whistle of the sungliders was the first warning Baruch's people received. A cry went up, and they fled by ones and twos into the thickest part of the adjoining woods, leaving behind half-stoken cookfires and their scattered possessions. A moment later the two sungliders slid gracefully overhead, banking toward the woods.

Three Corporation catamarans appeared at the curve of the river, each laden with green-garbed enforcers. The boats grounded themselves on the bank where moments before two children had been scooping fresh water from the river. The first enforcer to disembark looked around, spotted Hegan, and called across the water: "How many?"

"Eleven," Hegan called back, and the sweep leader nodded.

"We'll get them," he said confidently, and joined the other enforcers in pursuit of Baruch's family.

The sunglider wheeled in tight spirals above the treetops, directing the movements of the enforcers below. Success was almost immediate; one by one, the Outsiders were brought out of the woods handcuffed and loaded aboard the cats. They caught them all, in time: Zeke; Baruch's wife El-na; the teens Ken and Kris; Tony the hunter. It was a perfect sweep. The tagman had done his job.

Hegan looked down at his right hand and flexed the pinky finger experimentally. From the tip to the second knuckle, it was no longer original equipment. That had been left in the operating room in Chicago, replaced by a lookalike made not of sinew and bone but of metal coils and triggers. It was so sensitive. Just a bit of pressure on the soft synthetic skin, and a brief contraction of a reattached flexor muscle —

Since entering the Baruch camp two days ago, Hegan had moved among the family like a faith healer, shaking hands, rubbing tired shoulders, answering an affectionate hug, patting a child's head. Each touch had left a fine crystalline fiber implanted painlessly in the muscle and fat of an Outsider's body. No one had noticed. No one had wondered at the touch. Baruch's people were affectionate, demonstrative, even with strangers.

And now the crystals sang, absorbing and reemitting the radiation beamed at them from the sungliders overhead. For the enforcers and the detectors they carried, that song was like a flashlight in a darkened room. It led them unerringly to each crouching or running Outsider in turn. No amount of woodland skill could save them. The stealthy were caught as easily as the maladroit. They were puzzled, but they should not have been. The tagman's touch, not their own misjudgement, had betrayed them.

Hegan's touch.

Last to be brought out was Baruch himself, head hanging low in defeat. The sungliders appeared overhead, wagged their wings, and continued on.

Hegan picked and slipped his way down the face of the riverbank, waiting there until the lead cat crossed the river and swung toward shore. Splashing through the knee-deep water to it, Hegan clambered aboard with the help of several strong arms.

"Good work, Carl," said the sweep leader.

"Thanks," Hegan said automatically. He looked past the sweep leader to the three outsiders seated at the back of the craft. Baruch's gaze was trained on the deck of the cat, a clue to his feelings of failure. But Ken and Kris met Hegan's eyes and froze him with accusing looks. *You did this*, their eyes said, puzzlement and anger admixed.

Swearing silently, Hegan turned away. *Sorry, kids*, he thought. *It wasn't my idea.*

As the sweep leader's cat caught and passed the others, Hegan felt again the heat of the Outsiders' hate on his face, heat absorbed in the briefest glance at the other boats as they slipped by. He shrugged it off. *Civilization isn't that bad*, he thought. *You'll adjust.*

But to his annoyance, he could erase neither the Outsiders' look nor its message from his memory.

Hegan knew that the Outsiders were violating the Alien Acts. He understood that the Corporation found it most effective to use agents like himself against the Outsiders. He understood his job, and what it was intended to accomplish — bringing the Outsiders back into the communities they had fled or, in some cases, never joined.

What Hegan didn't understand was why the hurt, hostile eyes bothered him so.

The Corporation had once had a name: first a string of words, then an amalgamation of first letters. But in those days, there were several organizations of similar size. Now there was only one, and it was central to the country's life. There was no chance of confusion.

The Corporation presided over the country's meager catalog of resources, scavenging for every tidbit and doling them out with miserly reluctance. Technically, the Corporation was a consultant to the Washington government, recommending production and distribution plans. But its recommendations were never rejected, for the Corporation was not only the sole source for data but the means by which the plans were carried out.

The energy page of the resource catalog was distressingly short, and indirectly the cause of all the other problems. It listed seven solar-power satellites, each dedicated to a major city; ninety-four nuclear power plants, with dwindling ores and questionable net energy mitigating against building more; a few dozen aging hydroelectric dams with reservoirs slowly filling with silt; a trickle of oil and gas for the Gulf Coast and CA. There wasn't much to waste. Many smaller towns were on a wood- and grain-alcohol economy. Many more had disappeared: last one out, lock the door, thanks.

There were bright spots, at least from the Corporation's viewpoint. Tax structures, birth control, and the prospect of a dismal future had knocked the birth rate down. Tough Alien Acts and zero quotas had eliminated immigration of all kinds. But the fact remained that a mobile society had turned into a sessile one; a growing country had fallen into stasis.

But without the Corporation, it was agreed, it would have fallen much further.

Until recently, Carl Hegan's part in the efforts to prop up an energy-poor economy had been small. As a synthoanalyst, his job had been to come in on the heels of an errant prediction and find out what had gone wrong. The goal: to make the next set of projections more accurate. It was solitary, occasionally tedious work, but he was good at it and from time to time the Corporation even sent him by sunglider from the CA home to a problem site elsewhere in the West.

But things had changed suddenly two months ago, when in what at first seem-

ed an accident, Hegan had become a non-person. He arrived on schedule in MN, but his credentials did not. Not paper credentials, but electronic ones. They, and all his other records, had been lost in a transmission glitch. Non-person. Or worse, an illegal alien.

Meyers had saved him from the MN police, and even offered him a job. But he didn't restore Hegan's identity, and the job was a thousand kilometers away in Chicago.

The accident was contrived, and the trip to Chicago — through the new wilderness, on wit and grit only — was a test. Hegan passed the test, and presently stopped resenting Meyers for it. "I need people who can take care of themselves," Meyers said without apology.

And before Hegan had a chance to mull that over, he was put to work.

"So the sweep was a success," said Elgin Meyers, looking out the window of his twelfth-story Chicago office.

"Yes," said Hegan from the couch.

"You could sound more pleased. It was your first field assignment. You did well."

"Thank you." Empty, polite words.

"You have some problem with the program?" Meyers asked, turning away from the window. "A little soft-heartedness, perhaps?"

"Perhaps a little."

Meyers' eyes narrowed to slits. "You were a synthoanalyst. You know how carefully the allocations have to be planned in order to keep things running smoothly. The Outsiders take a Citizen's Share without contributing a Citizen's Share," he snapped, moving behind the desk. "They're like the aliens, only worse. They're our own people — parasites."

"They have so little, it's hard to believe they're a threat —"

"What do you think, they're some kind of noble savages, living off the land in some simple, wholesome way?" Meyers asked angrily. "They're neither noble nor savage. But they are parasites. And that makes them enemies."

"I —"

"It might be hard to see it in the Baruch family, I suppose." Meyers walked to the wall and pulled down a map of the Atlantic Regency — PA, NY, MD and NJ. "Know anything about the terrain here?" he asked, tracing a circle in midwestern PA with his finger.

"Pretty rugged, isn't it?"

Meyers nodded. "The Allegheny Plateau. Somewhere in here is the Baker family — the largest, best-organized Outsider family in the country.

"For nearly fifteen years, there's been undeclared war between the Bakers and the Corporation. Between the terrain and the sentry posts they've set up, we can't get close in any numbers. They go into hiding, and they do it well. We'd need ten thousand people to get out a hundred. More than once we ran ordinary sweeps and came up with nothing. So we tried from the inside. They're always taking new people.

"The first agents we sent in were too green — they were spotted and asked to leave. We trained special agents and sent them in, one at a time — hoping to get one or more assigned to sentry posts. We never heard from them."

"Killed?"

"Or absorbed. Their psych profile included a strong independence component. Maybe too strong. In any case, they're one of the reasons I needed to go outside of normal channels to get you. And their failure is why the success of the microtaggants means so much."

"Insurance," Hegan said suddenly. "Insurance that the agent will do his job — and that the enforcers will be able to do theirs. Insurance." He held up his right hand, pinky extended. "Me."

"Yes. Let's be plain — I'm your only link back to the normal life I took from you. You're Carl Hegan only if I choose to recognize you. If I choose not to, then you have no identity, no job, no future, and no way to escape the Alien Act bounty hunters. And that's the way I want it. I want to know that you're going to do your job."

"Someone with a little extra motivation."

"Exactly," said Meyers, returning to his desk. "If we can smash the Baker family, it'll be the beginning of the end. All the Outsiders know of them. They're a symbol — with power all out of proportion to their numbers." Meyers glanced at his watch. "And they're your next assignment. You'll be in their territory by this time tomorrow. Find them. Tag them — every last one if you can. Be sure to get the children. Even if you can't get all the adults, they'll stay with the children. You'll have six days till the sweep. Time enough?"

"Unless they hide from me or turn me away. Or kill me. They have guns, of course?"

"I would expect so." Meyers glanced at his watch again. "They're expecting you at Medical — some immunizations against insect-borne diseases."

Hegan nodded and rose. "Why aren't you afraid that I'll go overt to them, too?"

Unexpectedly, Meyers laughed. "And spend the rest of your life wearing the same shirt and peeing in bushes?" Then he grew serious. "Two reasons. One — and this one is enough — you're bright enough to see them for what they are. And two, what I took away, I can give back. And more."

"What do you mean?"

"If this works — if you do your part — in six months we'll have cleaned out the Outsiders' nests all over the continent. That means in six months you can be Carl Hegan again — officially. Or anyone else you'd like to be. With a hundred thousand credits to express our thanks and ease the transition."

Hegan stared, his pulse quickening.

"Two good reasons, eh?" asked Meyers with a smile.

"Two good reasons," Hegan agreed. "I'd better get down to Medical."

Hegan was dropped as close physically and temporally to the last reported contact with the Baker family as Meyers thought safe: ten kilometers and two days, respectively. As in the WI sweep, he was provided with convincingly worn shoes and clothing, a hunter's knife with a sharp blade but a broked tip, and a modest array of used camping gear. Thus equipped, Hegan hiked into the hills of the Allegheny Plateau.

The old highway, carved into the face of the hills, was littered with mounds of rock spalled off the rock faces by years of weathering. Dead, decaying leaves and rain-washed soil covered the cracking asphalt and concrete. Though he had seen the CA Auto Museum, it was still hard to imagine the highway as it had been.

In mid-morning, Hegan left the highway for a smaller road heading north. This road had not been carved into the earth, merely laid across its undulations. The air was chill, and Hegan found himself wishing the spare clothing in his knapsack included gloves. Hill-climbing brought a dull, persistent ache to Hegan's calves and thighs, which he did his best to ignore.

Near noon, he paused on a hilltop, debating leaving the road and striking off into the brush. There he heard a sound he knew only from the movies: the sound of a bullet being chambered in a bolt-action rifle.

A moment later, a voice called out to him. "Know what that was?" The voice belonged to a woman.

"I know it wasn't the welcome mat being shaken out," Hegan said, turning in the direction of the voice. He saw only unbroken thicket.

"Good. Then you won't mind complying with a few simple requests."

"Not at all," Hegan said, peering fruitlessly into the woods.

"Face east."

Hegan complied. Shortly the woman spoke again, this time ahead and to the right of Hegan. She had circled him without so much as breaking a twig. "Come on, then. Walk forward."

For the next hour, Hegan was guided crosscountry by the woman, never catching the slightest glimpse of her. He grew to appreciate the problems in conducting a sweep against such people.

In time she guided him to a pair of small tents flanking a fire circle. As they neared it she converged on his path from the right, and he saw her at last: tall, with crisp features, the rifle held with relaxed readiness. "Jack! Have a pickup," she called ahead.

A broadshouldered, bearded man emerged from one of the tents in response to her call. He looked Hegan over and nodded his approval. "Where'd you find him."

"Wilson Road."

"I'm Carl Hegan," the tagman interjected.

"Means nothing to me," said Jack. "Check him yet?"

"No," said the woman.

"Take your clothes off, then," Jack said to Hegan.

"What?"

"I can do it for you, but they may not be worth putting back on when I'm done."

Hegan stared at the Outsider for a moment, then slipped the knapsack off his shoulders and began to unbutton his jacket. The woman took up the knapsack and emptied its contents on the ground, hunkering down to paw through them.

When his feet and chest were bare, Hegan hesitated. "Keep going," Jack said.

Sighing, Hegan unbuckled his belt. He contrived to lose his balance while stepping out of his trousers, hoping to tag one of them as they caught him. But they let him fall, and enjoyed a chuckle at his expense. In a moment he stood naked, the crisp breeze horripilating his exposed skin.

"Hands," said the woman, stepping forward. She checked his calluses, then stepped behind him and examined his shoulders for strap chafing. Meanwhile, Jack felt throught he discarded clothes.

"Feet," said the woman, and Hegan sat down on the ground, then raised a leg up to her. It was an embarrassing position, but the girl was as clinically detached as the Corporation medicos who had built up the calluses and blisters she was checking.

When she had examined both feet, she pronounced, "He's been out for a while," and offered her hand to help him up. Hegan closed his right hand around her wrist, and as he came to his feet, fired the tagger.

One.

"How long have you been Outside?" she asked.

"Long enough to know that I want to be where it's being done right."

"Oh, and where's that?"

"Here. Unless Baker is just a mythic figure, like Arthur of Camelot."

The Outsiders exchanged a smile.

"One more hiding place to check, Lancelot," said the woman. "If you'll bend

over—

"Is that really necessary?"

"Not if you're planning to head back west."

"I could do it instead," Jack offered.

Gritting his teeth, Hegan bent over and grasped his knees.

Afterwards, Jack tossed Hegan his shirt. "So far so good. Get dressed."

The woman — Hegan never did learn her name — went back on patrol, leaving him with Jack. "What now?" Hegan asked.

"We wait," said Jack, with a sweep of his hand offering Hegan a seat on a nearby tree root. But that was the extent of his sociability; he was content to sit across the small clearing, whittling absently at a broken branch with Hegan's knife.

The background noises of the woods were presently drowned out by a man-made sound: the racket created by a trail bike, careening at what Hegan considered terrifying speed between the trees. It skidded to a stop near the fire circle.

"What are you running that on?" asked an astonished Hegan, rising to his feet.

The rider ignored the question. "Newcomer?"

"Take your opinion on him, Garv," said Jack.

The rider stepped close and looked Hegan up and down.

"Where's home?" asked Garv.

"CA."

"California," the rider corrected. "Say it all — when you're an Outsider, there's time enough. What'd you do there?"

"Synthoanalyst."

"For the Corporation?" Garv peered closely at Hegan's face. "You came all that way?"

"I walked out in Minnesota."

"When'd Meyers start recruiting out there?"

Had he not already considered the possibility that the newcomer was one of the absorbed agents, Hegan might have given himself away then. But he made his face blank, though biomonitors would have screamed another story.

"I thought this was Baker territory," Hegan said, deliberately misunderstanding. "Do I have to go farther east?" A hint of puzzlement wrinkled his brow.

But the newcomer was already turning back to Jack. "I've never seen him before — and Special Operations is a small world. He clean?"

"Yes."

"I may as well take him back to Central, then," said Garv, returning to his bike. Jack moved toward his tent, but Hegan cut him off.

"No hard feelings," Hegan said, offering his hand.

"Welcome to the family," Jack said, taking it.

Hegan smiled faintly. "Thank you," he said, making sure his grip was firm. Two.

Hegan tagged the rider en route to Central — once deliberately, and twice as he clung to Garv's body in real fear of being thrown from the vehicle. The bike's engine made conversation impossible, so Hegan tried to pick up landmarks that would let him retrace the route.

Central proved to be four tents scattered in an open area at the foot of an imposing cliff. It gave the impression of being temporary, the home of vagabonds. It also jarred with the image Hegan had of the Baker family.

Garv stopped the bike in front of one of the tents, and asked Hegan to wait while he went inside. He returned a few moments later.

"Ron'll see you now," Garv said. Hegan nodded and headed for the tent. As



he reached for the flap, Garv called after him: "Third room to the left."

Hegan got an answer before he could frame the question. Inside the tent were the open, hatchlike doors of an underground shelter and the pile of dirt used to cover them when closed. Between the open doors a stairway led down to a well-lit chamber. Tentatively, Hegan made his way down the stairs.

In the third room to the left, Hegan found a short man in an open-collared shirt, sitting on a couch reading. The man looked like an accountant on vacation.

"Ron?"

The man looked up. "You must be Carl. Take a seat," Ron said. "Take you long to get here? I think Garv said something about Minnesota."

"Several weeks. I'm not sure exactly how long — once I got Out, there didn't seem much point in counting."

"I suppose that's true when you're by yourself. We hew pretty closely to the calendar around here, though it's probably not one you've ever used — twelve months of twenty-eight days. This is September 25 — a Thursday, of course. Have any skills, Carl?"

"Probably none that can be used here. Listen, what is this place? How do you manage the lights?"

"Burn methane to drive a generator. It's inefficient, but it's safer than burning the methane directly. East is underground, too — it has a windmill array. Can you shoot?"

"No."

"Cook?"

"A little."

"Forage?"

"Well enough to stay alive."

"Farm?"

"No, never—"

"Mechanic?"

"No . . ."

"Chemistry? Metalworking?"

"A year of chemistry in college. Look, I thought I'd be getting a chance to meet Baker—"

Ron blinked in surprise. "I'm Baker."

"The Baker?"

"Well, there's my children. And a woman over at East changed her name to Baker, but we're not married. I guess there's a Chris Baker, too, new arrival over to South."

"You're the head of this family?"

Baker clucked. "It's really getting too big to call it a family, but yes."

"And you built this place?"

"Nope. This was built in the late '70s, early '80s by some people who called themselves survivalists. There must have been fifty homes and shelters built within sixty clicks of here — a dozen or so still intact. We use three."

"How do you get away with it?"

"Who would want to bother us?"

"The owners — or the Atlantic Regency — or the Corporation."

Baker shrugged. "No owners. And as for the Corporation, some of our best people were originally sent in to check on us. They're just going through the motions. We don't worry about them."

"Then why the guardposts, like the one I ran into? The tents to hide the entrances?"

"Because when you're dealing with people's whole lives — with families and homes that have been built with sweat, not paper money — you don't take chances," Baker said emphatically. "We don't expect the Corporation to bother us. But we're ready if they do. You make a life here with us, Carl, and you'll work hard — but you'll see us grow and things get better. There aren't many places where Outsiders are trying to do more than just survive. This is one of them."

"The best, I'd heard."

Baker snorted. "You came here expecting utopia, turn around and go back. Women die in childbirth. Men beat each other silly — occasionally. Shortages are a fact of life. This isn't utopia. But it isn't bad, either. You might call us primitive. But some 'primitives' on the African continent enjoyed a more varied diet and more leisure time than an American of the same era. That's what we aspire to."

"Leisure time for what?"

"Why — anything you want. Learn an instrument — study the stars — make babies. You'll see," Baker promised, rising and going to the doorway. "Steve!" he called. An ectomorphic teenager came running. "Steve, this is Carl. Give him the dime tour, will you, and then take him to Alicia. See that he gets a training assignment and a place to sleep."

"Sure thing, Ron," said the teen. Baker headed off down the hallway.

*Not a baton-waving fanatic. Reasonable. Apparently guileless, thought Hegan. But very canny. And very dangerous.* As he followed Steve up the stairs and into the sunlight, Hegan-added a footnote:

*For five more days, anyway.*

The tour was a boon for Hegan. They visited West, a cluster of log buildings hidden on a heavily wooded slope. He saw the satellite ground station — Steve took delight in telling how the family tapped the Corporation's ComFive satellite for news and entertainment. He was taken to the "dairy barn" — an old railroad tunnel used to house a variety of milk-giving beasts, as well as a handful of horses. He learned that the guardposts also handled most hunting, and ate an apple collected by the foragers. According to Steve, there were farms, too, though less than Baker wanted because "farms aren't portable." And Hegan got a handle on the total population: "A hundred thirteen, counting you."

Of that number, he was introduced to more than forty. He managed to tag all of the men, but the women were a problem. They were neither flirtatious nor ladylike. They were just — people. Which left Hegan at a loss as to how they could be approached. He tagged just four of them: two who gave him hugs of greeting, one as he peered over her shoulder into the innards of a methane generator, and the fourth as he collided with her in a doorway.

Eventually Steve brought him back to Central and delivered him to Alicia. She was a slender, animated woman with a nervous laugh and boyish blonde hair. She also had a large personal space, and kept herself well out of reach.

"For now, you'll have a training assignment and a work assignment," she told him. "It won't be as bad as it sounds, though. And Festival is coming, so you'll get a quick break."

Because of his far-removed chemistry training, she settled on a training assignment in energy — methane production. He was happier with the work assignment on the camp's oral newspaper, which would take him to all the encampments in turn. (Editor: "What's the most important job in this community?" Hegan: "Food-gathering?" Editor: "Wrong! The paper, because without communication we're not a community!")

After dinner — roast venison, a salad built on something that was not lettuce, and a heavy bread — Hegan spent an hour sitting in the starlight with several

others, listening to what appeared to be the Nth installment of the story of Badger and Toad. Hegan thought it foolish, and at first opportunity descended into the now-darkened Central and felt his way to the bed that had been found for him.

He was barely settled there when he was startled by someone slipping under the blanket beside him. He rolled over to discover — by her muted laugh — that it was Alicia, and — by touch — that she was naked.

"We women have our own training program," she whispered. "If you think you can manage *three* assignments—"

Hegan was flattered, and made no move to stop her when she reached for him under the blanket.

So flattered, in fact, that he did not tag her until they were done.

The morning came hazy, cold, and, due to the surrounding hills, late. After breakfast Hegan reported to the newspaper office and picked up the day's material and Gordon, the man he was replacing. For this first day, Gordon would run the route with him.

The paper's runner made one stop in each complex each day. There he would read the news and pick up new material, to be reviewed and put in sequence by the editor for the next day's run. A shortage of paper dictated the method; it was hard enough, apparently, to keep a supply for the contributors.

The paper's contents surprised Hegan. He had expected a generous dose of propaganda, perhaps an anti-Corporation diatribe, gossip, and functional items such as work schedules. What he carried instead was a mixture of learned and naive essays, humor, and capsulized world news (with editorial comment). There was even a piece lambasting Baker for his decision to send a party out to barter for tools. Hegan found himself wondering if he had overestimated Baker; only a weak leader would allow himself to be undermined that way.

Another surprise was the audience. The arrival of the paper's runner was the signal to lay down work and interrupt games. Nearly everyone came to hear, and they formed a rapt, appreciative audience. They applauded good news and good writing, and laughed at jokes, good or bad.

But to Hegan's dismay, there was no time to stay and mingle — and tag. The paper was longer than usual, advised Gordon and the route took six hours on a normal day. They took only enough time to drink and relieve themselves, and then continued on.

At the end of the day, Hegan was talked hoarse and exhausted. Worse, he had only tagged six more. And his newness was fading rapidly, especially at Central. People were less likely to make a point of introducing him to the family members he'd yet to meet. Faces and names were blurring together, making it hard to recall who was tagged.

Alicia sought him out at dinner. "You've seen it all now," she said, settling in beside him. "What do you think?"

"It's like an artists' colony with guns."

Alicia considered. "Kinda."

"But don't you see the contradiction?"

"No."

"You can't have a violin in one hand and a rifle in the other. Art is supposed to help man transcend the ugliness."

"We don't have any violins," Alicia said playfully, "though there is a fiddle or two. And the rest of what you said is silly. You have to be able to be just as nasty as anyone else — or you never get a chance to enjoy the more refined pleasures."

"That's not civilization."

"That's reality," Alicia said pointedly. "Like it or not."

The next day, Hegan put in four hours learning the care and feeding of a methane generator. Once cleaned up to his satisfaction, the day was too far gone for a trip to another complex, so he played with the children of Central instead. He tagged them all, as well as two mothers who were tickled by his willingness to play with their young and made pains to tell him.

But on Sunday morning, the day before Festival, Hegan had to admit that he was in danger of not completing his task. Half the time was gone, and he had only tagged fifty-eight — barely half. More importantly, he was seeing the same people repeatedly, while those he had not tagged — including Baker and other senior members — seemed to move in other circles.

At a loss to think of a solution, Hegan stopped by the paper offices to pick up the material for the day's run. He was early, and began to look through it before setting out. There was a sentimental piece about life in the Auto Age, a bit of poetry, a response by a Northsider to Friday's attack on Baker, and a schedule.

The Festival schedule.

Hegan scanned it quickly, and a smile spread across his face.

*That's when I'll get them, he thought fiercely. Every damned one.*

Festival. One of twelve in the Baker calendar, one at the end of each month. The day before Festival was Sunday; the day after, Monday. Festivals were timeouts. Most were two days long; one, which combined the celebrations of the end of the year, the Winter Solstice, and Christmas, was a week.

The Festival for September remembered both the year's harvests — admittedly small — and the anniversary of Sputnik's launch. It was called the Festival of Field and Sky. But the planned activities related more to the need to break the rhythms of work and return freshened by the interruption. There was a feast on the schedule, and a house-raising. There were concerts and a play.

And there were games.

They didn't ask if Hegan would play — they assumed it. Jack, the sentinel, played. Garv played. And Baker played.

For a while, Hegan wondered if he knew the game. There was no field as such, merely endlines. There were no uniforms. Twelve men lined up on each side, and other rules had changed as well. There was no audience. The ball had changed shape and composition. A score was one point.

But it was still football, and from the start of the game, they played with abandon.

Tagging his own teammates was easy. But Hegan's eye was on Baker, the other team's quarterback. Three times Hegan charged in from his spot in the secondary, and three times he found himself knocked to the ground before reaching his quarry. But with the score nine to seven and ten the agreed-on winning total, Hegan got what he had been waiting for: a broken play, and Baker running the ball — toward Hegan.

The tagman closed in, obsessed with the thought of bringing Baker to the ground. Baker feinted. Hegan lunged, fell. Baker danced sideways, but Hegan's outstretched hand closed around an ankle. His right hand. Baker stumbled, pulled free. From his prone position Hegan watched as Baker scored the winning point.

"Dammit, Carl!" screeched an unhappy teammate. "You had a clean shot at him and you missed him."

Hegan rose slowly, brushing the dirt from his arms. "Sorry," he said contritely. But inside he was jubilant. *Wrong!* his thoughts cried in answer. *I got him three times.*

The Feast of the Sky was held the second night of the festival, the night before the sweep. It was held under the watchful stellar eyes of Cepheus and Pegasus, and the larders were opened wide. They came in from all points to Central, in clothes newly washed and repaired. Assorted musicians took turns providing a melodic background to the chatter of happy, hungry people.

Alicia sat with Hegan and pointed out people of interest. "That tall man there — blue shirt — was a city engineer for New York. He's only been here since June and Ron's already calling him a family treasure," she said between bites. "That woman he's with was an Associate Regent in Maine."

"Makes you feel sorry for them," Hegan said, thinking aloud.

"What do you mean?"

"Well — ending up here. People like that."

"What do you mean, 'people like that'?"

"Oh — responsible jobs, well-educated —"

"What do you think the rest of us are?" she asked huffily.

"Well —"

"A lot of us have advanced degrees and left good jobs. We're not a clan of dolts worshipping some tree god. And those people came here deliberately to join us."

"Oh, once you're an Outsider you'd be foolish not to. But it's becoming an Outsider in the first place —"

"What do you think, we became Outsiders by accident? You've missed the point, Carl honey. It was one step — Inside to here. Like you — right?"

Hegan nodded, then used his empty trencher as an excuse to get up and cross to the food tables. Shaken, he needed a few moments alone. He had accepted that Outsiders would come here. But the thought that people such as he had been would willingly leave the Inside to come here was novel and unsettling. More than that, it exposed a new dimension of Meyers' anxiety about the Outsiders. The Corporation was losing more than a scattered Citizen's Share or two. It was losing citizens.

Later, when the food was all but gone, the scattered musicians became a group. And, to Hegan's delight, there was dancing.

"Like to dance?" Alicia asked.

"Let me watch for a bit," Hegan said, leaning forward. He was more interested in who was dancing with whom than in the style of dance. There were still two dozen untagged women among those at the Festival, most of whom had been protected from his touch by a monogamous relationship.

But the style was quasi-square dance: everyone was dancing with everyone, changing partners freely and frequently. "Let's go," he urged.

"You go," Alicia told him. "I ate too much."

Hegan did not argue.

The dances were unfamiliar, and Hegan's footwork only passable. But Hegan summoned up what charm he could, and his own endurance surprised him. He laughed easily. His touch was light, friendly — and permanent.

And when it was over, Alicia took him home.

They lay on her bed in a South cottage, bathed in moonlight from the uncurtained window.

"You enjoyed the Festival, didn't you?" she asked in a whisper.

"Yes — very much," he said, though the realization disturbed him. He had enjoyed being surrounded by people who were happy. Until she had asked, he had been concentrating too completely on his task to realize it. There was a difference between the Insiders and Baker's people. Both were determined, as though facing challenges — yet Baker's people escaped having a grimness of spirit. No one

here was burdened by the prospect of the next day — some even looked forward to it. And they had a spontaneity he had never before known. Just the way Alicia had come to his bed the first night—

"It wouldn't be too bad to stay here, would it?" she asked softly, as though aware of his thoughts.

Hegan's guard was down. "No. This is a good place — a special place."

"I know. Meyers doesn't understand," she said innocently.

Hegan started incriminatingly.

"Relax," she added hurriedly. "No one's coming through the door after you."

But Hegan could not be so easily calmed. "You're one of the agents!" he said.

"The first one he sent in — three years ago. And if you're as much like me as I think you are, you're realizing that for everything you had back there, you were also very alone — and that that doesn't have to be."

Hegan said nothing.

"Whatever Meyers wanted you to do — let it drop now. You fit in well here. Too well for it to be acting. And he needs to realize that we're too strong for him to hurt us. Not in numbers. Other ways." She ran her hand down his chest, and he recoiled slightly at the touch. "Think about it, Carl. Good night."

Hegan fell back against his pillow and stared up toward the ceiling. *Too strong? Not after tomorrow*, he thought, but without pleasure. The sense of having done something wrong descended on him firmly.

And then he began to fight it. *There's a warm body beside you, sure. But under orders. It's nothing I can't have back in CA.*

Then the foolishness of his internal argument dawned on him. His work was already done. Come tomorrow, there would be no family — no Alicia — to stay with.

*I could tell them.*

He tromped on the thought even as he had it. *You've seen how they steal people, tools, anything they need —*

*That's not why Meyers hates them*, he thought. *He hates them because they're the future and he's the past.*

But that stretched the known facts too far, and Hegan pulled back. *They just made you feel not alone. That's all this is.*

Hegan held his right hand before him at arm's length and studied its ghostly outline. *I should tell them*, he thought determinedly. *If they moved tonight, some would get away. Maybe a lot of them. They've been here fifteen years —*

Hegan could not admit to himself that he had already destroyed them. So it fell to duty, which ran deeper and older in him than these new feelings, to keep him abed and silent. Thinking dissolved in the solvent of the conflict into pointless, fragmented meandering. And though it was not his intent, while so engaged he slipped into sleep.

Hegan sat bolt upright in the bed, snapped awake by cries and clanging outside the window. Alicia's side of the bed was empty and cold, yet the sky outside was still dark. "It's too early," he said aloud, puzzled. Then he remembered the watchposts. They family was on the move, the move Baker thought they wouldn't have to make.

Half-dressed, Hegan stumbled out of the cottage and into the bustle of the clearing. "Alicia!" he cried.

A passing shape tossed an answer to him without stopping: "Try Central. She's in charge of records."

Central was a forty-minute run away in daylight; Hegan made it in thirty. He found it nearly deserted. Two men were frantically covering the second of the



shelter's three entrances. A trailbike stood near the third, and as Hegan drew near Garv and Alicia appeared on the stairs.

"Alicia!"

She spared him only a moment for a cold look; then straddled the machine behind Garv, a small box tucked under her arm. "You're on your own," was all she said. Then the bike roared away.

He stood alone on the trampled grass where last night there had been dancing. The two men with shovels abandoned their task half-finished and fled. Light was coming, and with it would come the sungliders.

Mechanically, Hegan picked up one of the discarded implements and finished the job of covering the third entrance to Central. He was barely aware that he was doing it.

*There's no point in running, he thought. Or is there? Or is there?*

He regarded his right hand with horror. If the detectors could find an Outsider with only a fragment of crystal, what of him with a two-meter coil? There was no running.

*Or was there? Or was there?*

He found it lying on one of the tables that had been used for the feast, part of the litter that would have been cleaned up that morning had Monday dawned a normal day — a small hand axe that had been used as a cleaver. He took it in his left hand.

And called himself a fool.

"I was drafted!" he cried out. "I'm not a volunteer."

He moved his right hand so the pinky lay flat on the edge of the table, the fingers curled safely out of the way.

*Don't think of it, he chided himself. You're taking more — a new name. A good name.*

He lifted the axe.

*Must get it all.*

The whistle of the sungliders was in his ears.

*Meet Carl Baker. Yes, the Baker. Now. But more will come.*

The axe fell, and Baker screamed. The scream became a whimper. Then, with the bloody stump of his right pinky cradled in his other hand, Baker ran. Behind him, the microtagger lay on the table and sang silently to the Corporation ships.

He would not be going back. Ever.

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## AFTERWORD

Listen — there are things more important than the age of my pet dinosaur.

For instance, the state of your local space program.

If the Shuttle turned into a pumpkin last April (I write this in March) it's probably fighting for its life. If it was a success, it's fighting for its identity — in danger of becoming NASA Trucking Company's big Mack and the Pentagon's Gunship Galactica. What a shuttle-type vehicle can do far exceeds what this one's being asked to do.

Meanwhile, the planetary exploration program is dying. Corpses are everywhere:

The Grand Tour, Halley's Comet/Tempel 2, the Solar Polar Orbiter, Galileo and VOIR (expiring even as I write), the Mars Rover (stillborn).

We are not using our hard-won technical knowledge. We are not reaching out with courage and vision to extend ourselves and enlarge our place in the cosmos. The reason is simple. The pro-space citizenry has sat on its collective duff and let the scientists fight for funds. Many Congressmen have come to the understandable conclusion that the scientists are the only ones who care.

You can change that — if you can balance your dreams with pragmatism — if you realize that even good ideas need champions.

*Write* — to your Senators and Representative (don't know who they are? For shame!). Send carbon copies of your letters to Rep. Don Fuqua and Sen. Harrison Schmidt (two pro-space Congressmen who head up the committees overseeing space

matters), as well as Stockman at OMB and Reagan. Don't wait for a crisis — do it now. If you can afford more than postage, join The Planetary Society or L-5 Society, give to the Campaign for Space PAC (Addresses? Space does not permit — try the nearest reference librarian).

GRONK!!

S'cuse me — time to feed the dinosaur.

### **From a Spirit to the One Possessed**

I know you conjured me, but not from hell;  
I came in light, but I was not aflame.  
You should be careful of the powers you name,  
For some are deaf, while others hear too well.  
When you were through with me, you made me leave;  
You gathered up and put away my bones;  
You cast a broken spirit on the stones;  
Never thinking that I might deceive.

Are you having trouble with your heart?  
Does it flutter when you stand too long?  
Is there something crawling in your womb?  
At last you've come to doubt your failing art,  
And frail with terror is your fending song;  
Ah, lovely one: Your body is my home.

— Orson Scott Card



**I** 6th century Prague: a maze of a city; river-spanning, hill-climbing, hollow-filling. A city of icy archways and shadowed canyons of stone. An anomalous assortment of gothic halls and churches and crumbling cramped wooden structures, decaying remnants of the original town. Prague: ghettoed with poverty, ignorance, prejudice, prostitution. A loose stone which possibly one day will be set within Czechoslovakia. But in the late 16th century that day is not yet, might never be. Meantime, the kingdom of Bohemia contains the labyrinthine city.

Lost in the familiar maze of Prague, uncaring Rivka, accompanied by her mother.

Rivka: small woman, small boned. Narrow hips. Breasts the mere buds of a budding adolescent, despite the fact she's twenty-two and past first bloom. Rivka: wounded. Loved a soldier, one Nathaniel, who loved her not so well. The soldier departed, and after his departure she withdrew, her spirit receding inwardly. Luckily — or unluckily — she did not suffer the added burden of being with child. (Prague was Rivka's world entire; the soldier's domain larger. In the eyes of Nathaniel, Prague was merely another exciting city; Rivka, another delightful conquest.)

Weak morning sunlight descends slantwise. Curly haired Rivka uncaring, prodded onward by her mother, an older woman who bears but little resemblance to the daughter.

Rivka's mother, Sarah: old and stooped, half-toothed. Her cheeks collapsing, hair colorless, flesh creased and sagging, she knows how ugly she's become but does not care. For many years she feared herself barren but late in life was blessed with this one child. Now she lives for Rivka through Rivka; Rivka's pains are her pains, Rivka's joys Sarah's, and so:

When Rivka brooded over the loss of her man, Sarah shared that woe. When Rivka refused to venture outside their home, Sarah invited her daughter's good friend Rebekah to visit. But, Rebekah's presence failed to lift Rivka's spirits.

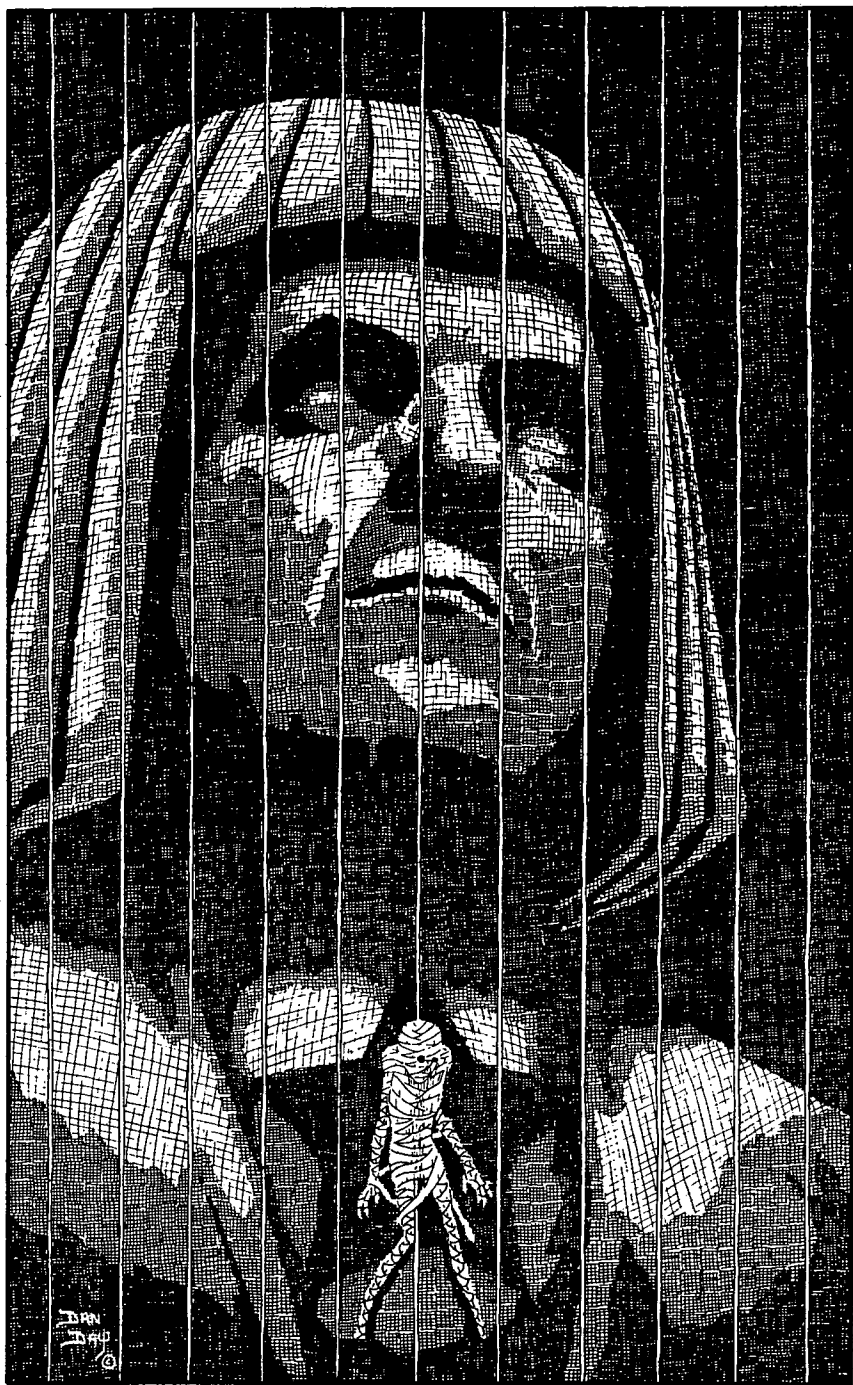
# **Kendall Evans**

## **THE GOLEM AND THE GIRL WHO DID NOT CARE**

**"The light flooding inward finds a place  
to impact. The golem now owns its own  
small artificial spirit."**

**THE GOLEM AND THE GIRL WHO DID NOT CARE 111**

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Philosophy (better to have loved and lost . . . ) also did not help. Scolding would not suffice. Pleas and threats alike Rivka ignored. Nor carrot nor stick held sway.

And, when Rivka refused to touch food for the third consecutive day, Sarah realized it was beyond her power to sustain the girl. Since this was an affair of the heart, obviously no physician could provide a medicine for her melancholy. Yehuda Low immediately came to Sarah's mind. A younger mother would likely choose a younger magician, for Low is well past his prime. But she has known him all her life; he has magicked for her many times (a good-luck amulet which periodically needed additional infusions of magic, and once a love potion). Since she too is now far past her prime, Sarah does not find this such a grievous fault in others.

And so she urges her daughter along the narrow streets of Prague, past the synagogue, into —

The Market Place. Invisible tendrils of odor: sweet stench of overripe fruit. The rank secret-harbor smell of fish in baskets. Colorful chaos. Greens and yellows of heaped vegetables. Dun stacked sacks of grain. The raw red-and-white of suspended carcasses (a pungent, acid tang). And everywhere, caracoling flies.

Near a vegetable stand, the potential delay of their neighbor Judith. Graying hair gathered in a bright blue scarf. Eyes gleaming. Widowed Judith, wishing to share her supply of mildly malicious gossip. Rivka halts passively. But Sarah, pricked by concern for her first-born late-born daughter, sees Judith as merely an obstacle which, politely, she by-passes.

... Across a bridge which cross the River Vltava, past warehouses, past a shabby boarding house, and up the stairs to the magician's door. The girl accompanies her mother without protest; she still responds to externals, but quietly and automatically, without strong will or slightest emotion.

Sarah raps against the worn wooden door. The magician himself answers her knock.

The Cabalist Magician Yehuda Low: old. Stooped, though not so stooped as old Sarah. Hair gone all white. Forehead featured with a prominent bluish vein, forked. His nose large and bulbous, eroded-looking. Faded robes worn and disheveled. Cousin to the famous Cabalist Rabbi Judah Low. A man who once owned stature and an enviable position within the community. A learned man. A man who has seen better mornings; better days. Half senile and overly studious, he sometimes, oftentimes mutters spells within his sleep, subsequently waking to minor domestic disasters.

Nervously, he ushers them within. The magician's attic is dusty, musty, pervaded with the stench of failure. Sarah does not notice. Rivka, despite her withdrawn state, does. Such is the death of the senses; the inexorable death of the senses.

Low says, "Sarah." Acknowledging her presence as if identifying an abstruse bit of scholarship. There are sparks of intensity deep within his eyes, partly shrouded by time's passage. "And this is your daughter . . . ?"

"Rivka. You remember Rivka? Well, it's been a time. And she was little . . . But you see, there was this soldier—" Sarah pauses awkwardly, looking sheepish, mystified as always when confronted with a professional.

"Rivka; yes. Of course. I remember Rivka. And how are you, young woman?" Low inquires, hints of impatience glimmering in his tone. The girl glances toward the magician without answering, her eyes distant. So must he appeal to Sarah, gruffly: "Your Rivka seems distracted; is she in need of magicking?"

"Yes," Sarah laments, "yes, she's in terrible need; won't eat or sleep properly.

And nothing seems to help. I've threatened and I've begged—"

While magician and mother discuss symptoms, Rivka ignores their words and gazes neutrally about the room. Cabalist's cranny: shelves and shelves of books and bound manuscripts. Dusty scrolls adjacent to the covered volumes. Stacks of loose, mouldering manuscripts. A cluttered table bearing racks of discolored phials, stoppered and stopper-less. A globe. An armillary sphere. Bottles of sundry sizes, shapes, colors. Papers. Candle stubs. Puddled wax. Old stains.

Finally, she gazes fixedly at an odd little construct at first overlooked. It stands amid the clutter. She experiences a dull flicker of curiosity. A child's toy? Magician's doll? It seems out of place. She fails to recognize the artifact for what it is — the cabalist's golem.

Mute golem: soulless assemblage of sticks, tar, string and cloth. Motionless homunculus. Mismatched circles of ground crystal for eyes. A spell gave it life (or life-in-death). Zombie-like, the golem follows the magician's commands, clumsily executing small chores. Created in a fit of inspired laziness of the part of Low, who copied the idea and obtained the animating spell from his famous cousin; who spoke the inevitable "*Shem Hameforash*," ineffable name of God, concluding the spell.

During the work of creation, Yehuda paused a moment to wonder: why was he laboring so strenuously to produce a servant of such limited capability? Yet over the past several years the golem has become a substitute companion for the lonely old man — something of a magician's familiar.

As for the golem, it speaks not, nor owns the power of speech. It perceives externals dully, without the goads of pleasure, pain, desire or terror. Except upon specific command from the magician, it remains immobile, apparently incapable of motion (which is how Rivka views golem at this very moment), as still as doll or statue.

Unblinking, all unthinking, golem returns the girl's fixed gaze.

Meanwhile, Yehuda Low debates within the chalky confines of his skull. He settles at once upon two possible spells as more-or-less appropriate. Now he must choose. One chant will induce selective amnesia, completely blotting out Rivka's memory of her soldier. He also knows a spell of affect. Rivka's emotions are drained by recent love and loss; the latter spell would restore her normal responses.

Each has its disadvantages. The spell which destroys memories creates a permanent gap. Rivka would carry the scar evermore. The other spell is transitory, lasting several months at the outside, fading the while, and difficult to repeat once its power wanes. Thus it is a temporary solution.

Indecisive, Yehuda plucks at his long white moustache; mutters as if no other were present.

Finally he settles upon the restorative spell as less harmful, less likely to be accompanied by side-effects. It will allow her wounds to heal naturally; gradually. And for the present, magic-imparted emotions will function in harmony with the girl's recovery from unrequited love. Or, he amends, temporarily requited love.

Coincidentally, when he positions Rivka in a chair of hand-carved oak (griffins romp in the chair's back; the armrests are of monstrous aspect, sinewy, terminating in clenched wooden talons) the golem is less than a cubit removed, not far from the table's edge. Motioning old Sarah to the opposite side of the room, he thoughtlessly neglects the golem.

Yehuda Low casts his elaborate spell (percussive, cantillated chant; words that seem mere gibberish to Rivka), capturing golem in the periphery of his magic.

When it is finished, Rivka blinks several times. Appearing suddenly more alert,



she attempts a smile; instead bursts into tears. She weeps not for the loss of Nathaniel, but because she feels so very tired; hungry; confused.

Sarah is relieved that any emotion manifests itself. Her face cracks a gap-toothed smile; at the same time she dryly weeps sympathetic tears.

As for the golem: a painful, diminutive epiphany is occurring within its small wooden skull. An image of reality forms — a manifestation. For the golem it is more like a detonation. a small universe, a microcosm, has been created. Before, the golem merely perceived. Now the perceptions gather form, substance, meaning. The light flooding inward finds a place to impact. The golem now owns its own small artificial spirit.

And it is Rivka the golem first sees; Rivka, radiant in the glow of golem's sudden consciousness.

Yehuda Low remains oblivious to his error; oblivious to the golem's transmutation. He politely accepts a single gold ducat from Sarah; a pittance, but more than he can expect from this poverty ridden old woman.

Enough, he decides; Yahweh is generous that he has allowed me to perform this service for another.

Smiling, he holds the door open for Sarah and Rivka, who covers her face with two small hands. "Bring your daughter in again this time next month. I want to be certain she's recovering."

Shaloms are exchanged. He watches as mother and daughter begin their descent of the stairs. He closes the door. His smile fades. Yehuda Low, alone with dust, clutter, and the reality-stricken golem.

Forewarned is fore-worried.

a careful reading of Scripture, as illuminated by appropriate passages of the Kabbalah, has revealed to the old magician Low his own impending death. A second, more cautious scrutiny confirms the first, but fails to pinpoint day or month.

He frets impotently. Initiates halfhearted attempts at putting his worldly affairs in order. Tries to comfort himself with the knowledge that one day the minds of all men will merge in harmony and control. Upon that day the Messiah will arrive, returning the world to its perfect state.

But these and all other beliefs swiftly degenerate into empty words, lost in the compass of his personal agony.

His only real comfort, finally, is a return to normal daily routine. He rises. Dresses carelessly. Abstractedly eats a meager breakfast. Studies Scripture. The Talmud. The Torah. Occasionally orders the golem to obtain a scroll he needs, or organize the clutter. Eats his second meal while still immersed in studies. Experiments with spells and potions. Despite repeated failure, despite his awareness of oncoming oblivion, continues attempts at distilling an elixir of longevity.

One day, two days following Low's realization of dread death's approach, Zacchaeus ben Bezalel the taylor arrives.

Ben Bezalel: short; stout. Possessor of a plodding, mulish grace. Totally in contrast with Low's tall awkwardness. A painfully honest man, painfully timid. Thirty years old and more; never married. Loneliness is lonely Bezalel's burden. Embarrassed and apologetic, the taylor desires a spell to free himself of evil thoughts.

Low is momentarily amused; it has been many a year since evil thoughts of this sort troubled the aging magician. He conceals his smile with a cough (the second and third coughs are genuine, begat by the first). Amusement overcomes his impatience at being disturbed from his work. Guilt replaces amusement; Low feels ashamed at making light of Zacchaeus's genuine agony.

Yehuda hurries the complex ritual (too much to do, too little time): spells spell-

ed and magic enacted. Ben Bezalel bargains. Ben Bezalel departs, simultaneous with the arrival of two further visitors. Unusual for Low to receive so much business in one afternoon.

Hannah and her son Isaac: overly-motherly mother; selfish, rebellious son. Young Isaac, Hannah informs, suffers from a crop of warts on his right hand.

Low takes the boy's hand in his own and examines the pliant, granular growths. More than a dozen, well advanced. No spell is appropriate, but one potion is. With brief muttered magic, he compels the golem to obtain a bottle containing the odorous, obnoxious blue liquid.

The golem: finally momentarily free (freed by Low's command) to move. Totters to the bottle of potion. Lifts. Carries the small, wax-sealed container to Low. Turns and returns toward its accustomed place. Hesitates. Moves on. Clumsily climbs up onto a dusty shelf close by the table. There the golem stands, lapsing into rigidity, but consumed with a sense of triumph: proud ruler of a view through the attic's single dingy window. Thus ensconced, the golem is able to perceive people walking along the opposite side of the street. If Rivka passes, it will see her.

Small but significant act on the part of the golem. Yehuda's household servant cannot move, except upon specific command from the magician. Once a chore has been accomplished, must return to its habitual resting place, motionlessly awaiting the next task. The choice of a new place extends the golem's limits, pushing against barriers of magic defining and confining its existence.

A younger, sharper Low would immediately notice this aberration, this sudden change in the golem's routine. But Low is lost in worries; his work; his separate world of symbols. Busy demonstrating the application of syrupy potion to Isaac's warts; busy freeing himself of Hannah and Isaac that he might continue his theosophical investigations.

Meanwhile: upon the shelf the golem waits, owning no sense of time. Motionless as time passes, day after day hoping for a glimpse of Rivka.

For it is Rivka the golem worships. She seems an ideal, an embodiment of perfect form and grace. All men, all women seem giant, amazingly well-formed beings. But especially Rivka. And especially in comparison with its own awkward and ill-formed body of sticks and tar and cloth.

The orders of the magician Low are now irritating interruptions. What if Rivka passes while the golem is not upon the shelf? Without the golem's knowledge? Unbearable possibility.

But. Vigilant golem one morning is rewarded. Rivka — or a girl it mistakenly takes to be Rivka — strolls along the walkway across the narrow road. Painful elation!

The image of Rivka is treasured, but the image fades. The golem's world remains severely limited: the cramped and drab magician's attic. Dusty and colorless. Endlessly monotonous. Little here to enliven the spirit; not even the small spirit of the golem.

Time passes. Entropy disrupts and dust is final destiny. Spells weaken. Spirit weakens. Golem declines.

It is an unusually warm spring afternoon. Low steps out onto the landing. Sunlight: bright and purifying, dazzling compared to yesterday's overcast. He stares toward the hillside across the river. Well he knows the terraced slope is beautiful. Memory tells him so. Yet he senses no beauty in the present; barriers separate him from the world. The barriers of time and declining senses. His own unwieldy personality. An inability to mesh with this moment. Fear. Pain.

Three men pass below, opposite, foreshortened by perspective. One carries a flute; another a stringed instrument, possibly a lute. Musicians, no doubt on their way to the Market Place, where coins change hands freely. For an instant he is tempted to follow, to hear them play. But his life has become so much process, so little passion; he fears the disappointment of music which fails to enchant. And who knows more of enchantment than a magician?

Reentering his attic (where he sometimes feels as if he hides his life away, like fearful animal within snug burrow) Yehuda leaves the door ajar, perhaps in the hope that fresh air, at this too late time, will improve his failing health. He prepares a hasty lunch; returns to his studies. He labors over a particularly intractable text. Standing; he squints at the passage. Mumbles as if this might help clarify elaborate ratiocination. Allows himself a minor curse or three.

— The stroke strikes. Without warning, like a blow to the back of his head.

Stricken, the magician crumples into the very chair where Rivka received his healing spell. He cannot speak; can say no healing spell to heal himself. He is as still as the dead, though death has not yet occurred; as still and dumb as the golem upon its shelf.

Could he speak, he would speak: *Shem Hameforash*.

Slow moments pass. Thought gradually reassembles. Terror recedes.

Desperate, Yehuda wishes that someone might find him; aid him. Imaginés ben Bezalel returning to complain that the lust he feels for his neighbor's wife is undiminished.

Sarah and Rivka: is this the day they are due to return? No, he realizes; tomorrow. A waste of energy to suppose that anyone will discover him. Rescue is unlikely. Better to still his mind.

Silently, he gathers strength. For sixty-seven years he has quietly maneuvered his way past obstacles, and he deals with the threat of death in much the same manner. He waits an hour. Another hour. Numbness tingles throughout his body; his right side feels lifeless.

Low glances toward his creation. Wishes it were possible to send the golem forth in search of help. Useless golem.

Useless tongue, refusing to command. Useless Yehuda. . .

Finally deciding it is time, Low lurches, pushing himself halfway up from the chair. If he can reach the open door it might be possible to signal for help.

But something further breaks within. A miniature disaster inside his skull — explosive buzz blossoming — and the world fades. Color and dimension drain from reality. He falls back into the chair, hands clenching clenched wooden talons. Does not sag, does not nod. Gathers no further strength.

The Cabalist Magician Yehuda Low, Yehuda Low, Yehuda Low: dead. At the age of sixty-seven, dead. *Sans* every last little thing.

The golem: exaggerated by superstition. No giant strutting through cities knocking buildings asunder; no monster, running amok. (Nor a protector of the Jews.) Naught but a small household servant made by magic: innocuous; inconsequential.

Yehuda Low's golem: burdened with emotions. Tortured by intimations of grace, intimations of mortality. Wishing to be more real. More human; less golem.

Knows of Low's death but does not comprehend it. Senses there will be no further communication from the master. A bond is broken, never to mend.

The open door, left partially ajar by Low, beckons. An elongate rhomboid of sunlight spills inward.

Will. The desire to move. A familiar balking, the impossibility of mobility without specific command. Will alone will not suffice. Unseen barriers intrude. Freed of its master, the golem longs for further freedom. Strains, as it has strained time and again. Nothing. Familiar frustration.

The rhomboid of light travels slowly across the floor. Fades; vanishes. Outside, shadows lengthen. The dim room grows dimmer. None approach to investigate the open door. No one misses Low. Not uncommon that he should stay cooped consecutive days within his attic rooms.

Night comes. The golem's spirit grows quiescent in the face of darkness's mystery. At night the world seems to disappear. All that remains is the peculiar internal stirring, which calms and calmly wanders.

Day dawns. The morning passes. Still no one comes to discover Low, so permanently indisposed.

Once more, past noon, a golden bar of sunlight spills across the floor. Once more the golem stirs in response. Strains to move.

Then: inspiration. The golem's supreme act, an act of the imagination, transcending golem destiny. Mute golem imagines Low's voice giving the order to move. Imagines the movement of Low's lips as the command is issued. Still nothing. Attempts a more vivid image within. Achieves it. Achieves it. Achieves the spastic thrust of an arm. Stumbles forward, as always awkward, like a man in fear of falling upon his face with every step.

Across the littered table. Past the Talmud. Past bottles and phials. Between twin worlds of globe and armillary sphere. Across, over, and down the magician, whose corpse is the most convenient route to the floor. To the door, conveniently open.

Through the door. Pause on the landing. Outside: the immensity of the world, particularly shocking after the cramped realm of the magician's attic. The small mind reels. The view through the window was framed by walls, failed to prepare the golem for this panorama. The flight of steps seems an angled precipice, frightfully steep. The ceiling of the sky so very far away!

Mute golem: awed, but without the release of expression. What peculiar mixture of terror and exaltation! Out and about in the same wide world wherein Rivka dwells. No matter that golem knows not where to find her. No matter communication is impossible. In love with lovely Rivka, golem owns the advantages and disadvantages of innocence.

Determined golem begins descent.

Each step, giant in proportion to the golem, involves preposterous effort.

Down the first flight slowly. One step at a time. Turning, lowering itself, dropping from step to step. Unjointed, stiff stick legs and arms make golem unadroit: distorted parodies of human movement.

A rough thick splinter. The golem's tattered brown cloth garment catches. Caught hanging between steps, golem panics. Flails. Tears free. Tumbles down the next two steps to the landing between flights. Rolls. Sprawls.

Stiff arms lever the golem upright. It totters to the next flight. Again begins working its way down. Dropping, step to step.

Past mid-flight the golem lands awkwardly; unbalances. Once more tumbles several steps downward. One stick leg breaks loose; rolls over the step's ledge; clatters dryly below. Thus ends the golem's miniature pilgrimage.

The small body spasms with grief. There is not enough spirit remaining within to retrieve the leg and lodge it back in place. Nor does the golem own enough coordination to retie strings which form the joint.

Golem: broken. Spirit weakened by weakening magic. By efforts beyond the scope of endurance.

Like a broken doll upon the stairs.

Prague: a maze of a city, meandering along both banks of the winding Vltava. Extending up the steep hill slope. Into the surrounding side valleys. Dark realm of magic, madness, superstition, fear. A city of indiscriminate architecture, containing buildings Romanesque and buildings Baroque in style. A city of narrow streets and shadowy archways. — Circumscribing Josef's town.

Josef's town: town within a city; labyrinth within a maze. Jewish ghetto. Fortress of isolation. Place of refuge. Semi-independent settlement containing Market Place, boarding houses, small isolated shops, synagogues. Containing Rivka's lifelong home.

Rivka: recovered. Reconciled to the loss of Nathaniel. Small woman, small breasted; lovely with the flush of youthful exuberance. Once more with her mother, once more on her way to see the magician Yehuda Low. Entranced by the cloying sensuality of river-front Market Place. Pausing to shop, bargain, converse. (Taciturn merchants wait passively near their ware. Noisy merchants aggress on passersby.)

Sarah: happy to see her daughter healthy again. Yet far from free of worry. Rumors of a possible pogrom have her fretting over the future — a future which seems less and less to contain a place for old Sarah. And will there be a place for Rivka? It is progressively unsafe to venture beyond the confines of Josef's town and into greater Prague, where hatred for the Jews abounds. The Blood Libel is rampant. Too many Christians truly believe the Jews need Christian blood for unleavened bread at Passover. Foul accusation. Even now, Rabbi Liva of Prague struggles against the Blood Libel.

Sarah sighs: morality declines; prices rise.

She admires her daughter's blithe unconcern. Rivka seems oblivious to larger processes; oblivious to the currents of fear which wax and wane in Josef's town — more interested in romance and the world's bright display.

If appearances do not deceive, Rivka is completely well. A shame to make the return visit to Low, Sarah reflects. Yet better to be cautious — God forbid a relapse. And, too, the second visit is something of a social obligation. So, although resenting the expense, Sarah will go.

Despite the city's turmoil and fear: festivity. A number of people have gathered at a gap between stalls; music emerges from the crowd's center. Rivka lingers, listening. Curious. she slowly works her way forward. At the inner circumference of the crowd: three musicians. One plays an ornamented lute; another, an intricately painted fife. The third provides the beat of a tabor.

Two small girls dance artlessly (yet beautifully) in response to the dulcet rhythms. A moment later, embarrassed by the crowd's attention, the two run to their mother.

When the music is over (stooped musicians collect tossed coins) Rivka moves on. She stops to buy pinches of salt and pepper wrapped in twisted brown paper; a whole garlic (pungent white cloves concealed beneath dry skins like those of an onion).

Arms laden with small packages, Rivka and her mother stroll onto Charles Bridge. At the center Rivka stops to look back admiringly upon the terraces of Prague mounting the slope. Towers, spires, gardens transform the city. And atop the rounded hilltop: Castle Hradcany. The wind-blown crystal air is a magic lens, focusing the beauty of Prague's detail.

Sarah hovers nearby, complaining, anxious to be on her way. Rivka yields to Sarah's impatience.

Beyond the Vltava, but a short distance to Low's dreary domain. The road

wends past warehouses, boarding houses. Reaching the foot of the stairs, Rivka takes her mother's arm.

She climbs, encountering the golem.

Rivka startles: did not the small arm twitch? Impossible; merely a crude homespun doll. The magician's doll, she recalls. Momentarily, Rivka stares down at the broken golem, wondering how it came to rest upon the steps. As if abandoned.

She feels discomfited: blank stare like accusation or plea. She takes her infirm mother's arm again. Again ascends.

The broken golem on the steps: foreshadow of a grimmer discovery awaiting. Rivka, awaiting Sarah in the magician's attic above. ●

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## AFTERWORD

Though I'm not certain who originated the idea, both Lester Del Rey and Kate Wilhelm have said that the magic in a fantasy story should be as structured — and as governed by laws — as science. If the magic is not limited, anything at all is possible, and the story's architecture and drama suffer as a result. I have adhered to this principle in my "Golem" story; indeed, the limitation of the cabalist's magic is tightly interwoven

with the theme. This is reflected in the golem's struggle with those forces which at once underlie and confine its existence.

What I've worked to create, here, is a fantasy piece that is as rigorous as any good science fiction story.

— Kendall Evans  
Ashland, Oregon

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## THE FORGOTTEN MAN

The gypsies play banjos on their ponies.  
The forgotten man continues to watch them  
In his ship that is going to the moon.  
The gypsies did not go since ponies  
Are not allowed aboard and banjos  
Have no sound when played upon the moon.  
The gypsies have forgotten him  
But he took a telescope  
So that he would not forget  
Them too. He likes to watch  
The gypsies ride the yellow ponies  
When there is nothing else to do, remembering  
The banjo music he can't listen to.


— Joey Froehlich



Thin, wiry and bronzed by strange suns . . .  
here was clearly a superior being . . .

**Thomas A. Easton**

# Return of the Native

 ur town is generally a quiet, peaceful place. There is little crime and less controversy. Politics is marked mainly by its unanimity, and the great issues of the day rarely touch us deeply. But we do have a few creative citizens with a knack for disturbing the peace. We also have a history that every few years throws up an echo to relieve the quiet.

This time — well, Bonny and I were at home, in the old, white farmhouse I've owned for years. We were in the living room, having coffee by the woodstove I'd plugged into the fireplace back when oil first went dear. Neither one of us was wearing much, which prompts me to say that wood heat is vastly underrated. Sure, it's cheap and it's personal, but it is also luxurious. You just can't bask in front of a radiator or a hot air vent. And when you are married to a dark-haired lovely, your ex-secretary, of remarkable intelligence, sympathy, and competence, you like to bask.

But that is really neither here nor there. We were having coffee, playing at backgammon, being snug amidst January cold and snow. We were talking, too, trying to decide whether we wanted children in our lives. We were no closer to a decision than ever when we were interrupted by a distant scream of sirens.

I wondered what was up. Bonny said, "You could call, you know. They'd tell you."

I allowed as they probably would. We listened as the sirens faded. They hadn't gone on too long, so whatever it was couldn't be far from the station. Probably right in town. I got to my feet, belted my robe, and headed for the phone in the kitchen. I called the station and got the Chief. I told him what I wanted, and he said, "The Hutchison place, Mayor. Mrs. Morse across the street reported a scream."

I thanked him and hung up. It could have been a burglar, a wife-beating, or just a nightmare, but I didn't ask why they'd used the sirens. Jack Hutchison was a councilman and the head of the school board, after all.

The next morning I went to my town hall office. There were papers to tend to, calls to make, people to see, all the busywork of being Mayor. And none of it was welcome, really. The job was unpaid, and I barely knew why I kept running. Perhaps it was that I felt needed, by everyone except my secretary. Louise had

replaced Bonny after the wedding, and she was a poor trade. For one thing, she felt sure she could run the town just fine without me.

The head of the Chamber of Commerce had just left, having put his case for a traffic light at the new mall. One was needed, but was that enough reason to bring in the first of the things? The town was small, and so far we had avoided them, except for a yellow blinker at Main and High. Most folks seemed to like it that way.

The door opened again a minute after he had left. I glimpsed Louise's backside moving my way, heard her saying, "You can't just barge in!" and spotted an old friend trying to get past her. "Hey, Howie!" I called. "C'mon in."

Louise stopped, turned around, and sniffed. "But he doesn't have an appointment," she complained.

"He doesn't need one," I told her. "You should know that by now."

She sniffed again, but she moved aside. The other pushed past her none too gently. Howie Wyman. Overallled, felt-hatted, work-booted. As grubby as a laborer, not that he worked unless he had to. He was the town loafer, dedicated to fishing and hunting above all else. And a friend.

With Louise gone and the door closed once more, I waved Howie to a seat. He took it, removed his hat, scratched his grey head, and said, "Keith's back."

I didn't say a thing. I was busy, getting a pipe from my desk drawer, loading it, lighting it. But I was puzzled. I must have shown it, for he added, "Hutchison."

Ah. Now I remembered. The teen-ager who had caught a ride on an interstellar freight train. Lydia Seltzer and I had taken him and another kid up to Pork Hill to look for the wendigo. He and Lydia had found it, too, though Lydia had made it back a mite sooner. I blew smoke and said, "The commotion last night, eh?"

"Ayuh," he nodded. He looked around the floor. I toed my waste basket toward him. He spat a stream of brown tobacco juice. "Saw him at the Diner this mornin'. Said his Ma screamed when he came in. Thought sure he was a ghost."

"And Jack?"

"Happy enough, I guess. His Ma, too, now."

I snorted gently. Like I said at the beginning, history and echoes. I wondered what Keith had been up to all these years — five, was it? — and what he was like now. What had he done and learned? What had he returned for?

Howie spat again. "Did say he had the best night's sleep since he left. Seems they don't use mattresses out there. More like hammocks."

I chuckled, imagining Bonny and myself. "Like to try one, would you?"

He shook his head. "Spent enough summers in 'em." He paused, as if remembering. "Said he'd be in to see you later on."

"Think I'd better tell Louise?"

He laughed. So did I.

I spend the rest of the morning trying to empty my IN box. I didn't succeed, of course — the mail came before I was done, and then I had it all to do over again. I groaned and gave up. My concentration wasn't what it should have been. My mind kept coming back to Keith's return. I kept asking myself what and why, thought I knew the questions were pointless until he came by to tell me.

Finally, I checked my watch and decided it wasn't too early for lunch. It would be the Diner. Keith had been there that morning, and perhaps Barbara would have something more to tell me.

Barbara Johnson had run her diner for years, taking over when her father retired and adding organic dishes to the menu. That had attracted the sprouts crowd, though she had kept the standard fare as well. It all was good enough, but

her reputation was based firmly on her pies and coffee.

Barbara was taking orders behind the long counter when I walked in. I hung up my coat, took a stool, and stared at the chalkboard full of specials on the wall before me. Within a minute, she stood in front of me. She rattled a cup of coffee onto the counter by my hand and said, "You hear the news, Harry? Keith's back?"

"Howie told me," I said. I looked at her. Bleach-blond hair threatening to explode from a hairnet. A strong lined face, a thickening body. She was always smiling, always friendly, always far more attractive than a first glance suggested. And she had never learned to whisper. Everyone in the place must have heard her question. When I turned my head, they were watching, their voices quiet.

"Damn," she said conversationally. "Sometimes I wish I wasn't tied to this counter. Then I could dash across the street and be the first to tell you something for a change." I nodded when she paused to grimace. "Did he tell you how different the boy looks?"

Interested, I said, "No," and asked her what she meant.

She shrugged. "It's hard to say. But different. Like he should be the boss of some big operation. You know why he's here?"

I told her I hadn't seen him yet, though he'd told Howie he was going to drop in. Then I gave her my order and settled in to listen to the crowd. They were talking Keith, Keith, Keith. He had defected to Russia. He had been kidnapped. He had run away to join a circus and had been around the world. He had disappeared in mysterious circumstances and been brought back by a flying saucer. That last was closest to the truth, I knew, and I was surprised that more people didn't seem to recall Lydia Seltzer and Pork Hill.

Louise ushered Keith in early that afternoon. I had spoken to her, but the results astonished me. She acted as if the young man behind her were an ambassador or a millionaire. She was completely out of character, and I was sure it couldn't be due entirely — or at all — to what I'd said.

Then I saw Keith. And he was different, just as Barbara had said. He was only in his early twenties, of course, but he seemed older. He was thin, wiry, browned by strange suns, tall enough to look down on most folks, and he wore an air of maturity, confidence. My first impression was that here was a clearly superior being. I had never felt that way about anyone before. I wondered if the Indians had felt the same when one of their fellows returned from a stay among the whites.

I stared while he took a seat. I stared until he broke the silence with, "Good afternoon, Mayor Bowen." I stared — he was the Keith I remembered, but a new Keith, a not-Keith — and I finally managed, "It's been a long time."

"It has." He smiled reflectively and adjusted a pants leg. The fabric was a light green that matched his shirt and jacket. The cut was strange, and there was an unfamiliar sheen. "I'm sorry I disappeared that night. You must have worried, I know my parents did. But I got too close to the tachtrain's field and . . ."

I waved a hand. "Lydia made it back. She had pictures, so we knew you were all right." I fumbled for my pipe. "And now you've made it back, too. For good? Or just a visit?"

"A visit, I think. The first of many. I've been trained . . ."

"We heard a rumor. Saucer pilot?"

He shook his head, gently. "No. They tend to start new groups off at higher levels than that. A test of responsibility, of potential. A way to give a real sense of participation. I'm a monitor."

Again, I remembered. I'd never met a monitor, but I knew of them. Scanning

the cosmos for improbability waves generated by the aliens' contiguity manipulators, devices that let one switch components among the parallel universes, the monitors were the aliens' rescue squad and police. Though not police, exactly. They watched, detected irresponsible switchings, and set things right again.

"Then you have a manipulator?" I asked.

"Of course." It would be implanted in his brain. "Though I'm not really here as a monitor. Not even as a visitor."

"You have a job?" I set my pipe down, interested.

He nodded. "My first real assignment. You might say I'm a trader."

My look conveyed the question. What could we have to trade with an interstellar civilization, a people who had tachtrains and contiguity manipulators? He answered me with words. "The Gerder Tap," he said. "It's an elegant solution to the energy problem. They've got nothing like it. They want it."

"But how?" I asked. "How do you hope to get it? The government has it more tightly classified than the A-bomb was in 1945. They aren't about to give anyone the plans."

He tapped his head with one forefinger and grinned at me. "The manipulator," he said. "There is a certain African dictatorship negotiating with Washington now for nuclear power plants. By the time I'm done shuffling the documents around, it will have Taps instead. And that will open things up for me."

After Keith's disappearance five years ago, the Army had stepped in. It had confiscated Lydia's photos and taken over Pork Hill, and ever since it had been trying to catch another tachtrain. It knew about Keith, too, and it must have heard rumors of his return.

It was less than an hour after Keith had left my office that I had more visitors. A trio of black-suited stonefaces, from Army Intelligence, they said. They wanted to know what I knew of Keith's return.

I told them as little as I could. Yes, I had been visited by a man who claimed to be Keith. But he didn't look much like the Keith I remembered. He might have been an imposter.

"Never mind that," said the tallest of the three. His name, according to his papers, was Kippers, John L. "We want the guy. Where is he?"

When I only shrugged, the second — Fenton, Samuel — said, "We think he could help us with the Pork Hill project. Get us into space at last. What did he want?"

"He was saying hi to old friends. What else?"

"That's what we want to know," said Kippers. He pulled the front of his jacket apart. A pair of handcuffs hung from his belt. "If you won't tell us, we'll have to take you back to the base."

I studied them while the third — I didn't catch his name — told me they'd already seen Keith's parents. I didn't think they could have been much help. I wondered if I would help or hurt Keith's plans by talking. I told myself the government would have to know eventually, and finally I said, "He did say something about being a trader now."

They jumped on that. Kippers almost shouted his next words: "And what's he after here?"

I turned my hands palm up and held them over my desk. "He didn't say. What could we offer an interstellar civilization? The only thing I can think of is the Tap."

They stared at me in silence for a full minute. Then, as one, they turned and left. They didn't even say, "Thanks."

The Gerder Tap had been invented by Abby Gerder, an out-of-stater who had come to town to set up a small hydro-electric plant. The plant's capacity was too small to suit her, though. In order to boost the output, she had devised a four-dimensional Klein bottle. The water fell downhill through the fourth dimension from the plant's tailrace to the turbine inlet, a perfect example of recycling. The device had let her go from 150 kilowatts to 2500. It wasn't possible, but it worked, and Abby was dreaming of wealth until the feds stepped in. It seemed she was drawing her power from the Maine Yankee nuclear plant up to Wiscasset; perpetual motion *wasn't* possible. They shut her down, studied what she'd done, and soon found out that she'd been tapping nuclear reactions directly. Suddenly, they had a way to snuff an A-bomb, stifle a reactor, or draw power safely and efficiently from the sun. The Gerder Tap, they named it, and it was being integrated into the country's power net as quickly as possible. For security, units were booby-trapped against tampering and spying. And Abby — and her husband — were permanent consultants, quite rich enough to keep their mouths shut.

The government was possessive enough about the Tap that I didn't believe Keith had much of a chance. His manipulator could confuse the paperwork, but I didn't see how he could change official minds or blind the security watchdogs.

Of course, I underestimated the power of paperwork. That became more than clear over the next few months. The headlines told the story, and they told it in a way that made me wonder if Keith was even involved:

**JAMBEZRI OIL FOR NUKES?**

**GUERRILLAS SEIZE JAMBEZRI OIL FIELDS**

**DEFENSE RELUCTANT ON JAMBEZRI NUKES**

**BOMBERS FREE OIL FIELDS**

**Gatin Asks Aid to Rebuild**

**AMNESTY INTERNAT'L REPORTS JAMBEZRI BLOODBATH**

**GATIN: ANOTHER AMIN?**

**EPA SUGGESTS SOLAR TAPS**

**NO REBELS, SAYS JAMBEZRI PRES**

**JAMBEZRI THREAT TO PROLIFERATION?**

**COMMERCE REFUSES NUKE EXPORT**

**DEFENSE SAYS TAPS COPYPROOF, NO WEAPON**

**JAMBEZRI TO GET TAPS**

That wasn't all of it by a long shot, but it gives the flavor. A ruthless dictator with a resource we needed, less for fuel now than for feedstocks. A trade offered. Worry about giving Gatin a way to build A-bombs. An environmentally benign solution that could never be an offensive weapon. Assurances that the booby-traps made it impossible for anyone to copy a Tap. And the decision.

Since Jambezri was a small country, it didn't take long to get the Taps set up. Within a year, there were Tap-powered desalination plants, irrigation projects, and factories. Within two years, Jambezri was well on its way to industrialized prosperity. And Gatin was out. With the sudden prospect of plenty, his brand of government, with its graft and monopolization of wealth, was no longer tolerated. His soldiers and police became consumers.

That was when Keith came back to my office. Howie was with me at the time. We were talking about going partridge hunting sometime soon. The season was

open, and by all reports it was a good year for the birds, but I was busy. Maybe too busy. My oil business had sunk with all the rest years before, and though I had hoped to be able to sell Taps for home and car use, they'd been reserved for the utilities. Still, I did a good business in electrical heating systems and in firewood. And with the cold weather coming, I was hopping.

Louise interrupted us with that look of respect I had seen only once before. I recognized it as soon as her head poked through the opening door, and I said, "Is Keith here?"

She nodded at me. "Mr. Hutchison *would* like to see you."

"Then send him in." She did, and I took a long look at the young man who had — I guessed — been working miracles in Washington. He seemed no older, though a little browner, and his alien clothes had been exchanged for a well-cut blue suit. He wore a tie and carried a slim attache case. He smelled of cologne, too.

I had compared him once with an Indian who had been among whites. Now I did so again. He had an alien education, perhaps alien values as well. But he also knew his native world, its gestalt, and could move among his erstwhile fellows as no alien could. He was the perfect stalking horse, and I wondered if he was just that, just as his like had been again and again in human history. He hadn't done anything I felt shouldn't have been done, but wasn't a monitor supposed to be a paragon of ethical responsibility? Still, could I — could we — trust him not to rip us off?

Howie nodded at him as he found a seat. "Good to see you again," he said. "Still like mattresses?"

Keith grinned. "I've been back in hammocks since then," he said. "But yes, I do."

"A matter of upbringing," I offered.

"I suppose so," said Keith.

Then I added, "You want to watch out, though, or there'll be some downbringing." When Keith looked puzzled, I told him about the Army men. "They want to pump you if they can."

He thought it over. "I can't allow that," he finally said. "But it's just as well you said what you did. It will help if they're ready when the time comes."

"I s'pose it's best, then," said Howie, "you shouldn't hang around long. Though I was hopin' to hear more about the folks out there."

"There isn't much I can say," the other answered. "To you or the Army. There are rules, you know, and I . . ."

"I understand," I said. "A monitor, especially, must respect the rules."

He nodded. "Besides, there was work to do, and then I had to go back for a time."

"Harry told me somethin' about that work. Seems to have gone all right."

"So far," I said. "But tell me, you can't tell us what it's like out there, I suppose for fear of interfering with our development. . . ."

"Something like that," said Keith.

" . . . but you're here as a trader. Won't that interfere?"

Keith shifted in his chair. He lost a little of his look of confidence. "Of course it will," he said. "But we need the Tap, and that is more important. Though I am supposed to get it without interfering any more than absolutely necessary."

"Then you should be tryin' to steal it," said Howie. "That way you'd get it, and no one here'd know the difference."

He looked still more uncomfortable. He stared at the wall for a moment. Then he said, "True, but we can't do things that way. There must be mutual benefit."

We were silent while I thought over what he'd said. An ethical trader, he had to



be. That probably meant both sides had to know there was a trade, too. Finally, I said, "I don't suppose getting rid of one dictator is enough benefit on our side."

He said, "Oh, no. That is only tactics, to make it possible to trade at all." He shook his head. "It's not strictly necessary, perhaps, but this is my first assignment. I want to try the things I was taught."

"Must be more, then," said Howie. "The Tap's still secret."

"There is." Keith lifted his attache case onto his lap and opened it. He extracted a moderately thick stack of white paper and held it out to me. "More tactics," he said.

It was a manuscript. I took it and glanced at the cover sheet. It bore my name. I looked at Keith. "What is this?" I asked.

"You are a mayor, a government official, someone who might be listened to. I would like you to send this to some journal where it will be read. Perhaps the *Foreign Policy Review*. Its effect will be the next step in my plan."

I hefted the manuscript. I opened it and began to read. The argument was laid out in excruciating detail, far beyond what I was capable of, but in outline it said simply that since exporting the Tap had stabilized one local political situation, it should be made available on a wider scale. It would provide the world with ample, cheap power, lead to universal prosperity, and — the author hoped — foster world peace. As I turned the last page over, Keith said, "The Jambezi case has not been lost on the rest of the world. Despite the political effects, there is great demand for the Taps. Even from the Communist Bloc."

I laid the manuscript on my desk and flattened one hand atop it. "And if this works? If the Taps are spread all over the world? If they do bring peace?"

"Then there won't be much point in secrecy, will there?" Keith grinned.

I sent the manuscript off, of course, and it was published. I didn't doubt it would be, since Keith could influence the content of memos and letters and the like. I wondered that he even needed the manuscript, unless there was no suitable counterpart in some parallel world, though that seemed unlikely. Perhaps this way was just the simplest.

At any rate, it worked. *Foreign Policy Review* is a journal read by statesmen and politicians and State Department bureaucrats. They saw the article, thought about it, discussed it, and in the end decided to ship the Taps — still booby-trapped — wherever they were wanted. In the process, they stirred up the reporters, who wanted to know more about the man responsible for the decision. I let Louise handle them. She was good at that. All I had to worry about was the Army. Its men came back, more than once, though they didn't learn a thing.

The economists helped by pointing out how much the resulting increase in exports would help the nation's balance of payments. I wished they would point out that there was no reason why the Taps couldn't be scaled down to a size that would heat a house or run a car. No reason, that is, except the interests of the utilities and the problem of fitting booby-traps into the smaller units. Electricity was cheap now, so cheap it was heating most homes and powering most cars, but small Taps would improve my business no end. Not that that was the real benefit of the Taps. I'd never dreamed they might result in world peace. Neither had the inventor.

And it actually seemed that they might. As they made energy cheap and plentiful for all, they removed many reasons for war — food, water, resources, even *lebensraum*. There were left only the nastier reasons — nationalism, ideology, religion — and they had been fading for decades. I thought prosperity might make them even less potent.

But how to build a Tap remained a U.S. secret.

I was alone the next time Keith dropped in. Even Louise was away for the day, off visiting friends or family or perhaps getting a little sun at the shore. It was a good day for it, sunny and warm and sweet with the odors of early June. It was such a good day, in fact, that I was planning to knock off early. There was a stream I knew, and a pool that should hold a trout or two, and . . .

But there was Keith, displaying a new tan suit, still brown and confident and superior. He was smiling, too, and when I asked him what he was so pleased about, he said, "I'm almost done now. The Taps are all over the world, there's no more excuse for secrecy, and it's time to trade."

I agreed. "It should be, yes. But the secrecy is still on. They're still booby-trapping every unit. They want to keep a monopoly."

He waved one hand airily. "No problem," he said, with a wider smile. "I can trade with any of a hundred countries, now. I can take a whole Tap home, booby-traps and all, where they'll take it apart and copy it. The booby-traps won't bother our engineers."

"Then why are you here? The Army still wants you."

"They won't for long."

"Why?" His confidence was baffling. In his position, I would have been frustrated by the barriers still facing me, but he, he almost seemed to be ignoring them.

"I would rather have the plans. The Army wants space. If you will get the Pork Hill commander on the phone, we'll both be happy."

I stared at him. Did he think they would be content to talk with him? They would want a full-scale interrogation, with drugs and hypnosis and relays of questioners. Maybe even rubber hoses. I said as much, but Keith only grinned again. "Call," he said. "Tell him I'm offering a faster-than-light starship, together with plans and a list of nearby colonizable worlds. But don't mention the manipulator."

The reminder reassured me. The manipulator would hardly be part of the deal, and with that in his brain, they could hold him only so long as he wished to remain. Locks would fail, I thought. Gas would appear from nowhere. Walls would crumble. And Keith would walk away.

I set my pipe aside and made the call. At mention of my name and title, the corporal on the switchboard passed me immediately to a lieutenant, who gave me a captain, who connected me with Colonel Dickson. All I had to say was that I had information on the Hutchison case.

Colonel Dickson was more than receptive. He sent a car for us, met us at the door of the quonset hut among the trees at the base of the Hill, and took us to his office. There he sat down behind a broad metal desk, motioned us to chairs, and said, "We've been parked here ever since you disappeared, Mr. Hutchison. We wanted to get one of our men aboard that tachtrain, but yours seems to have been the last to come through."

The Colonel was older than I had expected. Passed-over, perhaps, and given an out-of-the-way assignment. His hair receded above his hornrims, and there were deep lines beside his nose and mouth, lines that told the world how rarely he smiled. At the same time, he was slim, muscular, and he wore his ribboned uniform as well as a store dummy. Keith saw all this as he settled into his seat and adjusted his trouser legs. He said, "I believe they did change the route after I hitched my ride."

The Colonel's laugh was forced. "Then we've wasted eight years. Or have we? After all, we're here when you return. And Mayor Bowen says you want to trade."

I told myself that Keith could as easily have gone directly to Washington. He hardly needed a local intermediary, and I didn't think he would have used one if he hadn't been born and raised here. I didn't say what I thought, though. I merely nodded.

So did Keith. Then he spelled out what he wanted and what he offered. The Colonel's look of greed was unfeigned when he answered, "If it was up to me, you'd have your deal."

"But it's not?"

"Of course not. This'll go all the way to the top. But first, the Pentagon." He pulled out a drawer in his desk and extracted a white telephone. He lifted the receiver and began to talk, without dialing. The line had been open, waiting. After a moment, he said, "They want to know where the starship is."

"On the far side of the moon." Keith gave him the coordinates. "It's been there for a month."

"Then it should be on satellite photos." He spoke into the phone again, hung up, and said, "They'll have to check. In the meantime, we have a suite for you."

"We'd rather get back to town," I said. "There's work waiting."

The Colonel didn't want to let us leave, but in the end he had to. We allowed him only one concession, a man to stay with Keith, to see that he didn't disappear again. Not that it mattered to Keith.

The deal went through. How could it fail to? A not-so-secret Tap for a monopoly on interstellar travel. Though the monopoly turned out to be no more than a head start. The U.S. got a working starship, but the very day Keith left with the plans for the Tap, plans for the ship showed up in the capitals of all other nations. Keith was taking no chances on spoiling our progress toward peace.

I don't know why I was surprised at the shape of the starship, but I was. I had expected a flying saucer, a chip from the technological peak of Keith's adopted civilization. But when the news broke, the pictures were of a silvery oblong, battered and dented and scratched with age and use. It was obviously second-hand, obsolete, though it did mean our world's entree into space, a chance to spread out into colonies, to meet our betters on their own ground. It was a seed of the future, but only a seed.

When I thought about it, I realized the truth. Here on Earth, no one hands underdeveloped nations, even those with a few hyperdeveloped brains, the latest in technology. We don't trust babies with loaded guns. Why should those who sent Keith home? ●

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## **EPIGRAMMATIC FRAGMENT FOUND ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE MOON**

**"All is dust & darkness. . ."**

**— Peter Payack**

## CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH SELF & COMMUNITY

Marvin Kaye

CONTEMPORARY CULTURE has re-evaluated many of the mythic figures of past literature. Once Prometheus, Don Juan, Dr. Faustus, Manfred, even Maturin's Melmoth were prime symbols of rebellion from the established order that religion and social custom dictated. Today, aspiring above Self and beyond Community has become an attractive quality, a necessary pattern that a vastly changing world has created.

One might say, paraphrasing Aldous Huxley's famous essay, *Accidie*, that we have earned our right to *hubris*.

Ever since Aeschylus, literate fabulists have written and rewritten the myth of the hero-villain who deliberately isolates himself from the prevailing institutions of his age. Generally, this stance was formerly frowned upon by author and auditors alike, though, to give Oedipus or Don Juan their due, mighty arguments could be mustered to back up their determination to ruin counter to tradition.

Today, however, an important shift may be noted in the treatment of the "stranger" of contemporary fiction and philosophy. . . he has become popular in the public imagination. To reject the age and its shibboleths is now fashionable — and it is hardly surprising that the Jesus of Webber-Rice's rock opera, "Jesus Christ, Superstar," was so engaging a symbol when that musical *tour de force* first appeared. Staged and filmed with deliberate anachronisms that wed the Twentieth Century to Biblical times, it made Jesus a crucial counter-culture hero who spurned values supported by the elders of the two periods. Indeed, one of the most telling lyrics in the libretto is Jesus at Gethsemane proclaiming he has "tried for three years. . . seems like ninety." To the adolescent seeking instant recognition and immediate remedy, three fruitless years must surely appear an enormous amount of time wasted when all the answers seem so obvious.

But there is another breed of isolate now

significant in our culture's myths. Religious martyrs are generally conspicuous and popular in their own times, as well as latter ages, but the saviours of such works as 2001, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Glass-Bead Game*, or my own novel (with Parke Godwin), *The Masters of Solitude*, are pariahs or at least nonentities in the communities they strive to save.

Thus, Kubrick's "star child" must disappear from his own time and world in order to be literally and metaphorically reborn so he may revitalize a spiritually bankrupt Earth. Hesse's Joseph Knecht cannot dedicate himself to bettering his society till he thrusts aside his identity within it, that of Magister Ludi. Singer, in *The Masters of Solitude*, seems to loll away in a corner for most of the book, whereas he really is pulling puppetstrings in every important encounter of the plot. Likewise, the theme of artist/shaper of society's self-image as isolate may be eloquently observed in Chaim Potok's tragic *My Name is Asher Lev*, or for that matter, in practically every page that Thomas Wolfe ever wrote.

Note, too, the moving (and telling) peroration of Frodo the Ringbearer in the final chapter of Tolkien's trilogy: "I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: someone has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them."

To preserve Community, Frodo must relinquish it altogether.

In Steven Spielberg's eloquent film, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (CE3K), an unprepossessing hero, Roy Neary, a Muncie, Ind., power repairman (played by Richard Dreyfuss), realizes his dearest boyhood dreams once he accepts the loss of his traditional Community. . . wife, children, employment, home, planet.

What Neary gave up and why was not nearly so well defined in the original version of CE3K that Columbia Pictures issued a few years ago. Spielberg was so preoccupied with the awesome events of the final portion of the film — the arrival of, and confrontation with, a race of benevolent extra-terrestrials — that he did not convincingly characterize the protagonist or his domestic crises. They were set out as facts to be accepted without cavil in order to get on with the admittedly engrossing story.

But Spielberg had the good sense to listen to his critics and, in one of the few

"product recalls" ever to occur in the film business, recut and altered the original work. Last summer, it was released to American film theatres as *The Special Edition* of CE3K.

It is indeed special. Re-edited and fitted with several important new scenes, mostly dealing with Roy Neary's family problems (and with a few older sequences trimmed or deleted), the new CE3K is a masterful work of cinematic art that takes all that was good in the original and adds to the mix the internal cohesion and formerly-lacking character motivation.

The only minor cavil is that Spielberg elects to throw away that wonderfully poignant visual when Lacombe (Francois Truffaut) watches forlornly as Neary enters the spaceship and knows he has to remain behind. The visual is still there (though slightly trimmed, I believe), but it is used as a functional device for returning from within the Mother Ship to the landing field. Separated from its original referent, it loses its point and power. In the original, Lacombe's expression of wonder and loss was the perfect conduit for the audience's own sense of awe (and disappointment that soon the magic would end, leaving us no nearer the stars.)

Incidentally, much of the hoopla concerning the reworked CE3K concerned the expanded ending, the "inside" of the spaceship. This is unfortunate; it distorts Spielberg's real accomplishment: sharpening the focus of the complete movie. The ending is a lovely, understated moment, but not the space-hardware blowoff that a lot of juvenile sf-ers probably expected.

The new domestic scenes depict Neary's crumbling capacity to cope as a father, husband and employee. In the earlier print, the amorality of alien intervention was never adequately dealt with, and even now it seems a bit highhanded of the ETs to create so much familial disharmony for Neary, not to mention the frantic mother whose son, Barry, is wrested away.

But at least, the new scenes (most of which "work" because of the superb performance by Ms. Teri Garr as Neary's wife) make it plain that the Muncie, Ind., power worker was probably heading for a divorce sooner or later. (Or not, which may have been quite as tragic for both he and his mate.) Now we see Neary inefficiently and ineffectually trying to function as an adult

and role model in a junk-strewn world of trains, pap TV and bourgeois values, where his offspring cannot share his sense of wonder.

Neary is a nebbish who nevertheless has an instinctual awareness that the American dream has turned into a nightmare, that everything he loved as a child was not all kitsch.

Characteristically, at the beginning of the tale, he unsuccessfully attempts to convince his kids to see Disney's *Pinocchio* instead of playing Goofy Golf. One might speculate on ironies here; the Disney version of folklore is itself sanitized and prettified, though far less in *Pinocchio* than in some of the later films.

But Spielberg's referent is important and significant at a time when America ostensibly is returning to "traditional" values. Is Neary invited by the ETs to come aboard their ship because he represents the best of what we call "human?" Or is it because he has the gentle immaturity of a sweet child — like the actual child of the film, Barry? Is his lack of maturity the very clay from which the ETs will fashion a "star child" like Bowman in Kubrick's myth?

The penultimate scene in the ship is an extension of the birthday-cake lightshow that Spielberg achieved with the landing of the great Mother Ship itself. It continues, rather than explains, the mystery. To make the linkup unmistakable, John Williams' haunting score adds a direct quote from the quintessential *Pinocchio* song, "When You Wish Upon a Star."

CE3K is enormously successful in communicating that childlike spirit which dreamers of science and art indulge as they explore new worlds of imagination and reality. Yet Roy Neary pays a considerable price to achieve his heart's desire. . . he gives up everything traditionally "correct" in his lifestyle. True, at the end, he does it willingly, but it is important not to dismiss the great personal agonies he undergoes earlier.

Those who hope to bring our society into new and better paths ought to reflect on this recurrent message: it may be necessary to labor a lot longer than three or four years to bring our Brave New Worlds about. The road may be rife with pain — and the efforts of individuals who dare to sacrifice position and place to further the general good.

We need fewer martyrs and more Frodos. ●



Exclusive  
Sneak Preview

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THE LAST LINE  
OF THE HAIKU  
Sōmeiow Sucharitkul